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# RAMA-RAJYA

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S. D. NADKARNI

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WITH A FOREWORD BY

B. G. KHER, B.A., LL.B.,  
Solicitor and Ex-Premier of Bombay;

and

AN INTRODUCTION BY

2294  
NAD  
PROF. R. D. KARVE, M.A., (BOM.)  
Diplome d'Etudes Superieures (Paris);

and

An Appendix containing Writings on the Subject  
by Several Distinguished Hands.

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1940

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*Published by*

THE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION OF INDIA  
BOMBAY

RE. 1-4-0.

First Published in 1933 under the title:

# 'ON RAMA-RAJYA ETC '

BY THE

**SAMAJ SAMATA SANGH,**

**DADAR, BOMBAY**

*Second Edition (Revised) 1940*

## PREFACE TO THE 2ND EDITION

'Tis pleasant, sure, to see one's name  
in print,

A book's a book, although there's nothing  
in't."

--*Dyres*

KARWAR, }  
Aug 18th, 1940 }

S. D. NADKARNI

# CONTENTS:



## HEADING

HEADING	PAGE
Foreword ... ..	ix
Introduction ... ..	xiv
Preface to First Edition ... ..	1
Rama-Rajya: Introduction ... ..	2
The Vali Episode ... ..	7
The Sita Episode ... ..	20
The Sambuka Episode... ..	26
"Sambuka" and Subterfuges ... ..	27
"Sambuka" and Later Authors, ... ..	29
The Ekalavya Episode... ..	33
The Vamana Avatar Legend ... ..	34
Allegorical Interpretation ... ..	36
The Masses and Their Mentors ... ..	37
Reformer v. Saint ... ..	38
Man v. Avatar ... ..	39
Some 'Sacred' Texts ... ..	42
Sanctified Inequalities ... ..	47
The Priests and The People ... ..	58
The Gita ... ..	63
Ancient Writings and Modern Minds ... ..	65
Slave-Mentality ... ..	66
Aryavarta and 'Boerland' ... ..	69
A Nominal, Untraditional Varnasrama ... ..	71
Is Heredity Dependable? ... ..	73
The Hereditary Restriction—Its Waste and Harm ... ..	74
Isolation and Stagnation ... ..	76
Is Varnasrama Revivable? ... ..	83
How Hindus Slipped Into Non-Hindu Folds ... ..	90
Bigotries—Creedal and Racial ... ..	93
Sanctified Himsa ... ..	97
Conclusion ... ..	

## APPENDIX

"Rama-Rajya" ... ..	99
A Glance at the Foreword of Mr. B. G. Kher's ... ..	103
Epilogue ... ..	111
'Rear-Word' ... ..	117

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## FOREWORD.

I was reminded that in 1931, I had promised to write a foreword to the First Edition of this book, which appeared in 1932, but that I was prevented from doing so, as I was sent to Jail. I now hasten to redeem my promise in time for the Second Edition.

The book is written by a critical co-religionist of Mahatma Gandhi and is in the form of a letter addressed to him. The subject is well worn and familiar. It is the attitude of the orthodox to several episodes in the Ramayan and Mahabharat and to the sacred books generally. The Author is familiar to those who read the 'Indian Social Reformer', at any rate, that is how I first came to know of him.

There are some people, who draw a sharp contrast between the rational and the religious attitude of mind. They think that what is religious cannot be rational and *vice versa*. I do not think this is correct.

"Why am I here," is a question which some time or other every man raises in his mind or ought to. Very few are able to give a satisfactory reason. In fact, no one can prove that it would not be better for the world at large if his neck were wrung five minutes hence,' as Sir Leslie Stephen says, and yet no one is willing on that account to cease to exist. Man does not live merely by logic and the meaning and value of life elude its grasp. If we limit the word 'rational' to the processes of thought, which issue in demonstrations after the manner of mathematical arguments, and if all behaviour is to be termed irrational which involves the taking of a risk, I see no escape from the conclusion that human life is infected with irrationality at its very core. So far as any of us act upon the assumption that it is better for us to exist than not to exist, we are assuming what can never be "proved" (Religious perplexities by L. P. Jacks). There

is such a thing as "faith" and, as Jacks says, it is not a new faculty introduced into a man's life by religion, "it is neither a substitute for reason nor an addition to it. Faith is nothing else than reason grown courageous—reason raised to its highest power expanded to its widest vision." However, I know there are some highbrows who think that the demands of reason require them to scoff at what ordinary mortals hold sacred. They delight in making fun of it, in pouring ridicule on it and in calling it humbug, or hypocrisy, in their superior wisdom. There is no room in their minds for reverence for age or for sympathy for suffering. In the words of the Gita

असत्यमप्रतिष्ठं ते जगदाहुरर्नाश्वरम् ।

अपरस्परसंभूतं किमन्यत कामहेतुसम ॥ <sup>1</sup>

and see the following verses. I do not include Mr Nadkarni in this category. I see he has written what he has out of a misplaced feeling of chivalry and justice, and under what he believed was grave and sudden provocation.

I, for one, can not see any justification for summoning Shree Ramachandra into the criminal's dock at this late hour and charging him (1) with desertion of his lawful spouse, to wit Sita (2) with murder of one Shambuka, a Shudra—Sec 302 I P C., and (3) several other infamies and crimes and adjudging him guilty in a long written judgment extending over fifty pages. It may afford good scope for the exhibition of one's dialectical skill but it can have very little other effect. It is no use applying present-day standards of morality to legendary times and apportioning blame. People have looked upon Shree Rama as the embodiment of truth and as the ideal King, because in the discharge of his duty, as he saw it,

<sup>1</sup> Gita XVI 5 —

"Truth less baseless Godless they say the world is  
Gendered by mutual union—nay lost caused in fine

he made the supremest sacrifice. No one doubts his love and deep regard for Sita. His motto was

स्नेहं दयां तथा सौख्यं यदि वा जानकीमपि ।  
आराधनाय लोकस्य मुंचतो नास्ति मे व्यथा ॥<sup>1</sup>

That he felt and believed to be his duty, and for discharging it he sacrificed all. This is why people want Rama Rajya. That some of us do not today approve of what appeared proper thousands of years ago in the eyes of the people of those days, can hardly justify our condemning them today as immoral or unjust. If we did today what they did several thousands of years ago, we must receive judgment according to our deserts and present-day standards, but that is the end of it.

One can understand the Author's indignation at the attempt of some bigoted people, who in the name of religion seek to preserve their undeserved power, position and prestige and to resist the advancement in life and status of vast numbers of their co-religionists. They oppose all movements to abolish untouchability and to bring about social justice. Mr. Nadkarni has written this book with the object of exposing such people with whom one can have no sympathy. It is of course ridiculous to justify unjust social customs of the present day by referring to social conditions several thousands of years ago, or to quote Ramayan in support. Mr. Nadkarni's style is brilliant, and his argument clever.

I think the Author has taken unnecessary offence at the verse 'मा तु पार्थ व्यपाधित्य' in the Gita. The

<sup>1</sup> Put into the mouth of the hero of Bhavabhuti's drama entitled *Uttara Rama-charitam* (The Latter Part of Rama's Life) — Act I stanza 1' (See text p. 30) It means

Friendship, mercy and happiness as well yearn on Janaka's daughter

Were I to give these up to please the people, no anguish would I feel

(In the original Janaka's daughter is *Janaki*, which as is well known is a patronymic for Sita.)

verse does not mean that women, Vaishyas and Shudras are by birth sinful

I had promised to make this foreword very short I regret it has taken these proportions As I conclude, I hear a group of little children in the neighbouring house chant repeatedly

रघुपति राघव राजा राम । पतितपावन सीताराम ॥ <sup>1</sup>

I hope nothing that the Author has said in this book will unsettle their innocent faith in Shree Rama and in Rama Nama<sup>2</sup> and that to the end of time, millions of my co-religionists will continue to derive consolation and courage in the hour of their trial and grief by repeating रामनाम,<sup>3</sup> as millions have done in the past including the sinful writer of this foreword

B G KHER

Bombay, 14th August 1940

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<sup>1</sup> A Vernacular *Mantra* (psalm) couplet meaning "Lord of the Raghu son of Raghu King Ram Sanctifier of the fallen Fate Ram"

— 4 D N

<sup>2</sup> I.e., "Rama's name"

<sup>3</sup> Readers of this foreword are requested to turn to the Appendix, and in the 'Glimpse' at this foreword there view the other side of the shield

— 5 D N





## INTRODUCTION.

The occasion of my being acquainted with the author of this book was the publication of the book itself. That was some time in 1932. I had to review it for an English daily paper in Bombay. I did the review at a length unusual for a book of its size, for its contents and argument struck me as being not only worthy of being indicated to my readers in the descriptive way usual with press reviewers, but also of being sampled and summarised for the readers' benefit.

The original edition was published by Mr. Devrao Vishnu Naik on behalf of a reformist Sangh or Association in suburban Bombay. Its full title ran

**"ON RAMA RAJYA and the Slave mentality of Our Orthodox—An Expostulatory Letter to the Greatest Hindu of the Age from a Critical Co religionist "**

"The Greatest Hindu of the Age" is of course Mr. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, vulgarly known as Mahatma Gandhi, and his "Critical Co religionist," our author, Mr. Subrao Dattatreya Nadkarni.

A 'Publishers' Note' in the original issue, dated Dadar, Bombay, Feb. 1932, ran as follows

"It was in September 1931 that we undertook the publication of this brochure. When we did so we little thought that several circumstances beyond our control would conspire to delay its publication beyond the end of the year. However it happened, the fact is that only in this second month of the current year have we at last been enabled to present it to the public. The history of our venture is briefly as follows

"Mr. S. D. Nadkarni, the author of the work, sent us the MS. from Karwar in July last, with an offer to give the Sangh all rights in its publication, on terms which involved not only no pecuniary consideration for

himself but a promise to help the Sangh with a contribution of his own towards the cost of the publication. We shouldered the responsibility, not without a lively sense of the grave financial risk we ran in view of the country wide depression as well as the nature of the work itself. For a sharp challenge such as this to a time honoured home bred 'Slave mentality' is the last thing to be a popular seller. Yet the issuing of the challenge we did and do regard as a duty, not as a deal,—as a costly privilege rather than as a source of income to the Sangh, even with its poor resources.

"As regards the get up of our publication, we regret the numerous misprints which have remained in the final sheets in spite of the proof reading which the Author himself kindly undertook and carefully carried out for us. The most important of the misprints have been brought together by him in a list of Errata, which the reader is requested to follow in perusing the book.

"We hope, if circumstances favour us, to publish a Marathi version of this work soon."

It would appear, by the way, that though the MS had been furnished typewritten, the printing and get up of the issue were so bad that the Errata list mentioned in the above Note was, as one of the reviewers of the publication at the time said, in need of an errata list for itself! However, the book appears to have been well received in almost all quarters in the Press, both English and Vernacular, in India and in England. Of course, in some pseudo reformist as well as anti-reformist quarters in India, not much enthusiasm was shown by the reviewers or noticers of the book, if at all they condescended to notice it. Others praised the book with varying degrees of warmth and enlightened their readers on the points at issue with various quantities and qualities of light. Mr Mahadev Desai, secretary to Mr. Gandhi, in a letter to the author, referred to "Rama rajya" as 'your ably written book. But what about 'Dear Mahatma' himself?

A copy of the book reached him, I learn, while he was lodged in Yerawda Jail, after the close of the second Round Table Conference on India in London, when of course he could not engage in any political work and might surely have spared any number of hours of his 'enforced enjoyment of the King's hospitality' there to writing or dictating a reasoned reply or at least a simple acknowledgment to the author or to the publisher of this expostulation with him on the subject of his pet *Rama-rajya*. Was anything forthcoming? Yes. After some reminders was vouchsafed a promise to deal with the argument of the book, time permitting. But up to date, nothing has come of it.

May we take his silence for consent? Surely not. Mr. Gandhi has been harping upon *Rama-rajya*—though perhaps more guardedly than before—but all the same with no retraction of his earlier praise of King Ramachandra for abandoning his devoted wife Sita and for such other 'unselfish' deeds of the King God or 'God Himself'.

So much for the reception of the book. What about its subject-matter? As to that, I can only say that though the occasion of the book being written was a topical one, it discusses no *current* topic, but only *recurrent* or evergreen topics, so to say, for India, and for Hindu India in particular. Although it is a dated expostulation with a dated preface, nothing that has happened so far, or is likely to happen in the near future, can 'date' the appeal of the book. The 'passing show,' on the other hand, seems only to intensify the urgency of the appeal against theocracy.

While the author's aim is to lead the reader to the rationalistic outlook and to plead for it in all spheres (p. 66), he does it, as his title indicates, not from the standpoint of one who disowns all religion, but as the *co-religionist* of his nominal addressee, Mahatma Gandhi, 'the Greatest Hindu of the Age'. I have no quarrel with the author on this account. This mode of writing may indeed appeal to a wider public than a purely rationalistic consideration

of the subject would I do not see any objection to a rationalist taking up, for argument's sake, a position which is not normal to him. In this particular case, for instance, it is worth while to prove to orthodoxy that even from the religious point of view, "Rama rajya" is not the ideal that the Mahatma claims it to be. It means only selecting from the rationalist's armoury the particular arguments which will appeal even to religious people, and in my opinion this does not involve any breach of principle, and this method is likely to prove more persuasive than sheer iconoclasm, which of course has its own uses. Provided that there is nothing dishonest in the argument itself there is a school of rationalists which prefers this method as more effective and Mr. Nadkarni evidently belongs to that school. Even those who do not belong to that school need not quarrel with it on that account. Rationalists at least should be tolerant.

Mr. Nadkarni does not rest content with the 'debunking' of the woeful ideals blindly accepted and blatantly preached by our 'Mahatmas' and other 'mentors of the masses', for, while recognising (and honourably mentioning, not merely not denying) the worth of Ramachandra (p. 24), our author wants Sita and Sambuka to be formally lifted on to the pedestals of religious martyrdom and gives a place in Hindu Hagiology—the one as the representative of 'repressed womanhood' and the other as that of 'suppressed castes' (pp. 24-25).

Here is a real challenge to religionists, Hindu religionists in particular, who are apt to charge rationalists with destructive predilections, though in my opinion Mr. Nadkarni's 'constructivism' has so element of grim, almost vengeful, humour in it.

I would particularly recommend Gita 'fans' to look into the purgatory through which Mr. Nadkarni has passed their favourite Bible, which he has done in a way at once good humoured and erudite (p. 28).

The footnote on p. 13 on the origin of Miss Mayo of 'Mother India' fame and the Europeans, is indeed calculat

ed to tickle the reader's fancy, as the parallel elaborately drawn between the ancient Aryavarta and the modern 'Boerland' (p. 66) is sure to stir his historical imagination

The parallelism suggested (p. 5) between King Rama and Lord Clive, "The forger, and founder of the British Empire in India", is not the less illuminating for its cursory peep into the future. If anything, it is the more likely to strike the educated reader's imagination on that account.

Bombay, 15th Sept. 1940.

R. D. KARVE.

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

As the immediate excuse for this infliction I can plead the birth and activities of a body named 'The All India Varnasrama Dharma Swaraj Sangh' At Jalgaon in Maharashtra during the last Christmas this Sangh held a Conference, which was attended by 15,000 people and four Sankaracharyas, and was presided over by His Holiness Sri Vallabhacharya of Nathdwara, and at which Sri Santoji Maharaj, as Chairman of the Reception Committee, in his opening speech, "after criticising the absence of religion in the educated classes, said

"We do not want blindly to follow Western institutions and to become materialists as the Westerners Congressites are only striving to make India another Europe, where there is constant warfare We want Swaraj and Religion together We want Swaraj as we had it in the days of Ramachandra . . . ."

Now for a few fruits of this 'Rama rajya' Conference, as it may be called

Sudras and Untouchables, as well as women of all castes, were excluded from near the scene while a 'Vishnu yaga' ceremony was being performed The Untouchables were prevented from attending any of the Conference proceedings But Mahomedan policemen were among those who were there to keep order The resolutions passed, *inter alia*, condemned the Sarda Act (the Child marriage Restraint Act) in strong terms as interfering in religious matters and stated that Sanatanists would be prepared to break it if necessary Another resolution which dealt with the question of the remarriage of Hindu widows declared that a widow, however young she might be, was forbidden by the Sastras from remarrying and condemned legislation permitting such marriage A third resolution referred to the Untouchables as being within the pale of Sanatan Hindu religion, but qualified it by stating that they did not form part of the Varnasrama or four caste system

KARWAR

S D N

March, 1931

यामिमा पुष्पिता घात्रं प्रवदत्यविपश्चित् ।

वेदवादस्ता पार्थ नान्यदस्तीति वादिनः ॥ Gita II 42

# RAMA-RAJYA.

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## INTRODUCTION.

Dear Mahatmaji,

On the subjects on which I am now venturing to elicit your opinion I had long meant to write to you, but various causes, not the least of them being your enforced enjoyment of the King's hospitality, supervened to induce me to postpone a half-done work. But a perusal of the reports of the All-India Varnasrama Swaraj Sangh Conference recently held at Jalgaon in Khandesh (Maharashtra), of which you will find a brief account prefixed to this Letter, has almost goaded me to finish the work and fulfil my long-entertained desire.

I venture to approach you for an expression of your considered views on certain questions, not because I myself have any considerable doubts on them, but because there are such queer ideas abroad, which a clear enunciation of your views would go far to correct.

I shall deal first with three episodes in the Ramayana (not only as they are handled in medieval or comparatively modern versions of the epic like Tulsidas's in Hindi, but as we read them in the original or Valmiki's Ramayana itself), one in the Mahabharata, and one in the Bhagavata. They are (1) the Vali episode, exemplifying the counterpart of the modern 'White man's burden' in ancient Aryavarta, (2) the Sita episode, or the story of man's inhumanity to woman, (3) the Sambuka episode, or what is perhaps the oldest story of religious martyrdom, (4) the Ekalavya episode, or the story of sanctified racialism, and (5) the Vamana avatar legend, sanctifying 'Nietzschean' morals. I shall then pass on to certain other topics suggested by or arising out of a consideration of these five stories.

## THE VALI EPISODE

The first-named story, as narrated in Valmiki's Ramayana, may be summarised as follows

When during their life of exile in the Dandaka forest Sita was abducted by Ravana, Rama was beside himself with grief. He raved and wandered through the forest, calling to her every now and then like one out of his senses. From such a disconsolate mood he was roused by Lakshmana, who told him that it was his duty as a man and a husband to hunt out the despoiler of his gem and to kill him, if for nothing else, at least for the sake of the Aryan name. They then set out together in search of her.

They eventually fell in with Maruti and Sugriva who had seen Ravana carry away Sita in his chariot. Rama found in Sugriva a fellow-sufferer and even more. Sugriva had been expelled by his elder and stronger brother, Vali, who had also appropriated his fair wife to himself. (This had been done in revenge against Sugriva, who taking advantage of his elder brother's temporary absence from his capital had usurped his throne and had similarly appropriated his wife to himself.) Sugriva with his friends, the chief of whom was Hanuman who subsequently became Rama's greatest friend, lived in a secluded glen of Kishkindha. A compact was soon struck between Sugriva and Rama that the latter should assist the former in slaying Vali and recovering his wife, and that Sugriva when installed king of the 'Monkeys' should assist Rama in finding out Sita and chastising her captor.

The three then set out for the capital of Kishkindha. It was arranged that Sugriva should invite Vali to a single combat, and that Rama should destroy him while fighting with Sugriva, with an arrow. A wreath was bound round the neck of Sugriva in order that he might be distinguished from his brother Vali, a powerful barbarian, came out of the city at the insolent message sent by Sugriva and accepted a single combat with him, not dreaming that there was a third person standing at a distance who could slay him down from there. A fight



ensued between the brothers like a fight between gladiators whose only weapon is their hands. Rama, perceiving that Sugriva was losing his ground, sent an arrow which levelled Vali to the earth.

Tara the wife and Angada the son of Vali came out from the city weeping for the dying king of the 'Monkeys'. Vali reproached Rama for his unjustifiable conduct in raising his arm against him without provocation. Charging Rama with treacherous behaviour, unworthy of a scion of Raghu's line and unbecoming of an honourable warrior such as he believed him to be, Vali said to Rama, 'Thou hast killed me in order to effect thy purpose with Sugriva's help. But if thou hadst only told me the object of all these thy machinations, I myself would have brought back thy wife in one day. I would have fought the wicked Rakshasa that has carried away thy wife, and would have secured him and delivered him to thee with a noose round his neck, as I had once done to him. Thou hast, however, killed me in unfair fight. What answer wilt thou give to people when they ask thee concerning thy conduct towards me?'

The reply of Rama in exculpation of his conduct is thus worded: 'The earth with all its forests and mountains belongs to the Ikshvaku race, whose duty it is to punish or reward beasts, birds and men according to their deeds. Bharata is the king of that race now, and we are his lieutenants and move about the world by his order to establish Dharma. Now thou didst a blameworthy action. While thy younger brother Sugriva is alive, thou canst not cohabit with Ruma who is his wife and almost thy daughter-in-law. He who cohabits with his daughter or sister or daughter-in-law deserves death. The king who does not punish an offence, knowing of it, is himself guilty.'

Rama in the end comforted the dying Vali by telling him that Sugriva who had no son would make Angada his heir apparent. Rama then installed Sugriva in the vacant kingship of Kishkindha. Sugriva not only thus obtained a kingdom and his wife, but took to wife Tara, the beautiful widow of his deceased brother.

Discussing this episode in his "Riddle of the Ramayana" (1906) to which in the main I am indebted for the above summary, Mr C V. Vaidya says

"Apparently Rama's action seems reprehensible, a dark spot as it were, on the fair and untarnished glory of this immitable hero of India. The justification which Rama gives of his own conduct in the poem of Valmiki no doubt sounds casuistical, but is based on that assumption of universal sovereignty which the Aryans arrogated to themselves in their conscious superiority over the aboriginal races of India. Cortez acted in exactly the same strain when he called upon all Indian caciques [*i.e.*, native Mexican chiefs] to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Spanish Emperor and in default threatened to treat them as rebels to his own sovereign 'the rightful lord of these realms' (Prescott, Vol I) It is the right by which the stronger and more civilised nations intervene in the concerns of a weaker power on the ground of *musculé*. Rama after all was a human being and this dark spot only brings out in greater relief the moral sublimity of his conduct throughout the rest of his life" <sup>1</sup>

In a footnote the author continues

"Why Rama killed Vali when he was not fighting with him has been explained by the poet in another way. Vali was a monkey, and a human being had by nature a right to hunt a wild animal. In fact Rama took his stand on the rights of hunting by which he could kill even an innocent and unoffending animal. The explanation is indeed fanciful and based on the assumption that Vali was really a monkey."

Let alone the absurdity of a man being said to make alliance and bold converse with mere monkeys the explanation is also incompatible with Rama's charging Vali with sexual immorality; for surely human morals cannot be expected to be binding on sub-human creatures

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<sup>1</sup> Evidently Mr Vaidya does not disapprove of Rama's part in the next two—the Sita and Sambuka, episodes herein dealt with though the latter of these does not happen to have been noticed by him at all in the monograph in question.

Mr Vaidya then remarks "Probably Rama and Sugriva together fought with Vali, but supposing the story was originally such as we find it, we can understand Rama's position by remembering that civilised nations even now do not admit the uncivilised races to the same rights in war as are enjoyed by the civilised nations. Had it been otherwise, the Dumdum bullet would have been interdicted in every warfare."

He is right. The words put into the mouth of the Aryan prince in reply to Vali's forceful accusation of treachery against him are such as might be credited to any Imperial bounder of recent times in his dealings (say) with African chiefs. In fact, Prince Rama claimed to take up what may be called 'the Aryan man's burden,' as Western Imperialists today claim to take up 'the White man's burden'. Is there any material difference? Only, their heroes like Rhodes (of Rhodesia fame) or Clive (the forger, and founder of the British Empire in India) have not yet been raised to Godhood,—though they may be some hundreds of years hence. Who knows? We are wisely forbidden to pry into the origins of rivers and Rishis. Else, one might discern through the miraculous story that is told about Rama's end,—that he being tired of his mundane life dipped into the river Sarayu and was straightway transported to Vaikuntha bodily,—the sober fact of his having ended his life by drowning in that river; just as Clive, who is already the "heaven born general" and "illustrious founder of our Indian Empire", but who died by his own hand,—I suppose by shooting himself with a pistol,—might be depicted by a future British epic poet as an incarnation of God Thor, who having grown tired of life on this planet invoked Thunder and Lightning, and was by them taken back to Valhalla.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I let my supposition stand as it was in the first edition although I find that Clive did away with himself by means (not of a fire-arm as suggested but) of a razor for the debunking parallel sought to be drawn between King Rama's end and Lord Clive's is in no material way affected by the supposition's fact being put in place of the actual historical one (1940).

"The Non Aryans at that period had only one right—that of being conquered in warfare (by the Aryans)", tersely remarks Mr. K. N. Kelkar, discussing the Vali episode in his recent Marathi pamphlet.<sup>1</sup> If, as in this particular case, the warfare on the Aryan side was not straight, but crooked, it is all right: because the Non-Aryan 'Monkeys', having only 'the right of being conquered in warfare,' could claim no right to a fair warfare!

Now, Rama's conduct towards poor Vali has been sought to be defended or excused, and has even been lauded, by most of our poets who have handled the theme, as (notably) your favourite Tulsidas. Yet is fairness to our ancients I must note an apparent exception which is provided by the Mahabharata in one place. It is where the ever truthful Yudhishtira, for once reduced to uttering a deceptive quibble on the battle-field,<sup>2</sup> is reproached by Arjuna for his unfortunate lapse, which led to Drona's death, and the following words are put into the reprover's mouth:

"Thy ill fame, in consequence of the slaughter of Drona, will be eternal in the three worlds with their

<sup>1</sup>"Some Thoughts on the Ramayana" Poona, p 66—It is to be regretted, he has not dealt with the other two Ramayanic episodes I have taken up in this Letter

<sup>2</sup> It was at the instance of no less a person than Shri Krishna, who advised the hard pressed Pandavas 'to care more for victory than for virtue', that, in order to compass the death of Drona, the formidable generalissimo of their opponents, it was bruited about on the battlefield that 'Asvatthaman was killed', while in fact it was not the aged Drona a only son of that name, but an elephant of the same name, that had been killed. Drona wishing to verify the rumour asked Yudhishtira, who was once his pupil and justly famed for his truthfulness about the truth of it. In a weak moment Yudhishtira who knew the truth prevaricated, and let Drona be confirmed in his impression that his beloved son had been killed. Thus was he who was the mighty leader of the Kuravas, yet a fond old father, made to lose all interest in life including the warfare he was conducting, with the result that he was easily dispatched by one of the Pandava allies. Yudhishtira who, alone among the five brothers and their wife, is said to have been permitted to enter heaven bodily, is represented as having lost one of his toes on his entry thereon on account of the sin he had committed in uttering the untruth or half truth on that occasion

mobile and immobile beings, like Rama's in consequence of the slaughter of Vali" Drona parvan, ch. 197, v 37, Kum bhakonam edition चिरं स्थास्यति चाकीर्तिस्त्रैलोक्ये सचराचरे । रामे वालिवधाद्यद्बद्धं यत् द्रोणे निपातिते ॥

## THE SITA EPISODE.

For the following summary of the story culminating in Sita's final separation from her husband, I am again indebted to Mr Vaidya's 'Riddle'

After Ravana's death and the fall of his capital, 'triumphant Rama' ordered Bibhishana [Ravana's brother] to perform the obseques of the great king of the Rakshasas, observing that his enmity ceased with his enemy's death. He then asked Lakshmana to have sea water brought in golden jars, and seating Bibhishana on the vacant throne of Lanka, he poured the holy water on his head, consecrating him king of that country. Having thus rewarded his ally he next thought of the long suffering Sita and sent Hanuman to apprise her of the death of her tormentor and the victory of her husband. The poor forlorn woman felt as if she was alive again, and in her joy she was sorry she had nothing to give to Hanuman in return for the happiest news she had ever heard in her life. She said she wished to see her lord from whom she had so long and so painfully been separated. Rama on hearing the message thus sent with Hanuman at once asked Bibhishana to get her duly bathed and anointed and to have her brought with due decorum.

"In a few hours a palanquin escorted by Rakshasas appeared and Bibhishana directed his mace bearers to remove the crowd that surrounded Rama. Rama interposed saying that a woman's appearance in public was not blameable at the time of a sacrifice, a marriage or a great calamity. He asked Bibhishana to bring Sita before him on foot that all his friends might have an opportunity of seeing her. Lakshmana and Hanuman Bibhishana and Sugriva were pained to hear these words issuing from Rama's mouth, and Sita too with

her heart failing within her came and stood in front of him. With mingled feelings of joy, wonder, and affection, the devoted wife gazed at her dear husband's face. But in that countenance the feelings of shame and rage alternately appeared, and Rama slowly said, "Here art thou, O Sita, conquered back from my enemy. I have done what a brave man ought to do, and have together wiped off my enemy and my disgrace. I have fulfilled my vow and rescued thee from confinement. The great deed of Hanuman in jumping across the sea and entering Lanka alone has indeed borne fruit now, and so indeed have the valour of Sugriva and the friendship of Bibhishana. But remember, all this was done in order to vindicate my honour and the honour of the great Sun race. As to thee, thy sight does not please me now, as that of a lamp does not him whose eyes are sore. Go wherever it pleases thee, for what honourable man will take back a wife defiled by a long stay in another's house?"

"These words fell like a thunderbolt on the ears of the unhappy woman and she felt as if life was passing away from her, but slowly summoning up courage she replied, "Wherefore dost thou utter these harsh words, treating me as a worthless man treats his worthless wife?" I swear and am ready to prove that I am pure. I was indeed touched by Ravana, but I was helpless. I am doomed indeed beyond remedy, if my life-long devotion to thee established during a contact of years was not sufficient to convince thee how my mind is pure. Influenced by rage thou lookest upon me as an ordinary woman and settest no value on the sacred grasp of my hand at the time of marriage, my devotion, my character." With tears rolling down her pale cheeks she said to Lakshmana, "Raise me a pyre of faggots. I cannot live in the face of such unfounded accusation. The only course open to me, abandoned as I am by my displeased husband in public, is to burn myself in fire." Lakshmana in his anguish looked at Rama, but finding that he was not opposed to that course, at once had a pile of faggots brought and

set on fire. Rama held down his head as Sita going round him made her last bow to him and approaching the fire said, "As I am pure at heart and always devoted to Rama, may this fire protect me on all sides, as Rama thinks me defiled though I am pure, may this fire protect me on all sides", and then with the courage of a devoted wife she threw herself into the pile of burning wood. A cry of horror arose from the assembled crowd of men and women, and Rama with tears starting from his eyes looked up. But god Fire brought Sita unscathed out of the burning pile and told Rama that she was pure and sinless. Monkeys and Rakshasas saw the great ordeal. Rama received back his wife with joy, observing that it was necessary that his wife who had lived so long at the house of the unscrupulous Rakshasa king should perform an ordeal before he could take her back.

Mr Vaidya here takes occasion to observe 'Such was the great ordeal which Sita performed in order to prove her sinlessness. Whether such ordeals are possible or not we will not pause to discuss, for in spite of that ordeal people doubted even in Rama's time whether Sita was pure or not. There are, however, strong reasons which go to convince us that Sita was never forcibly defiled by Ravana. The last editor of the Ramayana [1], whoever was responsible for the last revision of the text of that epic] has put in two different stories, viz. that of Nalakuvara's curse and the curse of Brahma to explain why Ravana was prevented from compelling Sita, a mere woman, by force to be his wife. Why Ravana did not take such a course can be explained however on a more historical basis. We have already shown that it was a custom among the Rakshasas to forcibly seize and carry away women for wives. But it was also a custom among them that when the wife of a living man was carried off by force, she was allowed a period of one year to reconcile herself to her new condition and in order to allow her husband an opportunity to rescue her by killing or defeating her captor. We find it stated in the Mahabharata that in the Rakshasa form of marriage the woman ought

to be allowed a period of one year before she is taken to bed. It is curious to find in the Ramayana that Ravana allows the same period to Sita to reconcile herself to her new condition. And it appears certain that even if Rama had not succeeded in rescuing her within one year, Ravana would not have compelled her to be his wife against her will .....

After describing Rama's return to Ayodhya and his magnificent coronation there, the narrative proceeds

'Rama was now supremely happy, but this happiness lasted only for a few months. Sita was now pregnant and according to Indian custom he asked her what thing she most liked, and she replied she would like to spend one day among the Brahmin settlements on the banks of the Ganges. Rama promised to fulfil her wish, and as he came out of the palace and asked as usual for news, his reporters told him that the people were all happy under his rule and extolled his great exploits, but that they wondered how Rama derived pleasure in the company of a wife who had been defiled by a long stay in Ravana's house. A great man's conduct, they said, was an example to others, and were they expected to do the same thing?

'It was the old story or rather the ever recurring story. Sita's abduction by Ravana had for ever poisoned the cup of Rama's remaining life. Rama breathed hard and heaved long, but having determined upon the course to be taken called his brothers. With tears in his eyes he told them to do what he ordered without remonstrance if they loved him. He told them what people thought of his wife and himself, and of the action he was going to take in consequence. He would give up his wife, even his brothers, even his own life, to please and satisfy the people. He then asked Lakshmana to take Sita next morning to the Brahmin hermitages on the other side of the Ganges—fortunately she had already expressed a wish to go there—and to abandon her there altogether.

'Next morning saw Sita accompanied by Lakshmana seated in a chariot running wildly through the country



of Ayodhya towards the Ganges. Poor Sita could not understand why Lakshmana's eyes were blood red. "Why dost thou grieve so much?" said the unsuspecting Sita. "I too feel sad for being separated from the broad chested Rama, but we will return tomorrow after giving these valuable clothes and ornaments to poor Brahmin ladies." Lakshmana could not utter a single word, his throat being choked with tears. At last they were on the banks of the Ganges and were soon ferried across by the fishermen. Then Lakshmana fell at Sita's feet, and with hot tears issuing from his eyes he said, "Pardon me, O blameless queen, for what I am doing. My orders are to abandon you here, for the people blame Rama for keeping you in his house."

'It was too much even for the long suffering Sita and she fell down insensible. When Lakshmana brought her round with the Ganges water, she cried long and bitterly. At last she said "I do not know what sin I committed in my former life, or what man I separated from his wife. I lived in the Dandakaranya for years, but Rama was then with me. How shall I live now without him? I would indeed have destroyed myself but for this precious burden which I bear in my womb. Go, Lakshmana, go, do thou the command of the king. And tell him my message. 'You know me pure and devoted, but abandon me in deference to the people's wish. It is my duty to acquiesce in this, that scandal may not sully your great name. A husband is to a woman her god, her preceptor, her friend, and she should do what pleases her husband even at the cost of her own life'." Lakshmana bowed to her and advising her to take shelter in Valmiki's hermitage left her with a wrench of his exhausted feelings.

<sup>1</sup> Though Sita is here made to sing the tune of that *pativrata* doctrine which would allow no woman to call her soul her own and would make a wife's lot consist of all duties and no rights yet it is somewhat refreshing to find Kalidasa portraying her as a little more spirited lady in that he makes her in her parting message through Lakshmana ask the king her husband whether his action in deserting her in her circumstances was worthy of the illustrious line to which he belonged. (*Raghuramya* XIV 61)

Rama engaged his unhappy mind in righteously ruling his subjects and in performing a number of Asvamedha sacrifices. Years passed away, when during one sacrificial session his attention was drawn by the singing of two beautiful Brahmin boys. He called them to him, looked at them minutely and heard their singing with a riveted ear. His heart began to yearn towards them and inquiring who they were, he came to know that they were his twin horn-sons by Sita and brought up by Valmiki who had come there for the performance of the sacrifice. Rama was now deeply excited and anxious to be re-united with his beloved wife. He sent message to Valmiki that he would like Sita to swear her innocence in the great assembly of Rishis and princes, monkeys and Rakshasas who had come to assist in and witness the performance of his Asvamedha sacrifice.

Next morning accordingly a great concourse of men, Rishis, princes and citizens assembled in the sacrificial hall. In anxious expectation the concourse became stony and motionless, as behind Valmiki walked the trembling and emaciated Sita with hands folded in adoration and thinking of Rama alone. "Great is Rama," cried some, "great is Sita" cried others. When she was in front of Rama, Valmiki said, "O son of Dasaratha, here is Sita whom you abandoned in consequence of public disapprobation. She will now swear her purity if permitted by you. Here are your twin horn-sons bred up by me in my hermitage." "I know," said Rama, "that Sita is pure and that these are my sons. She performed an ordeal in Lanka in proof of her purity and therefore I took her back. But people here have doubts still, and let Sita perform an ordeal here that all these Rishis and people may witness it."

"With eyes cast down on the ground and with hands folded, Sita swore. "As I never thought of any man except Rama even in my mind, let Mother Earth open and bury me. As I always loved Rama in words, in thoughts, and in deed, let Mother Earth open and bury me." As she uttered the oath, the Earth verily opened

and Sita was carried away inside seated on a golden *simhasana* [throne]! Heavenly flowers fell on Sita's head while the audience looked on as in a trance. Rama with his head hanging down and tears running down his cheeks stood motionless long clutching his wand, till at last overpowered with rage and grief he cried: "Give back, Mother Earth, give back my Sita; or else take me within thee that I may live long with her in the recesses of thy heart." "Give back, Mother Earth, my Sita," said he again, "whom I brought back even from Lanka, or else I will harass thee from ocean to ocean." When he came to himself he dismissed the sages assembled and sought refuge in a cottage of leaves

<sup>1</sup> At this point, one may well take up the fanciful suggestion once put forth in the press, that the soul of this Sita, most devoted of wives, yet a most grievously wronged one in due course incarnated itself on the other side of the Earth i.e., in America as Miss Katherine Mayo vowed to lifelong maidenhood and to revenge on Hindu manhood (As to the unscrupulousness of her ways, I suppose, that is to be ascribed to the general degeneracy and baneful influence of this Kali Age!) If I might match this conceit with another of my own, I should say that if the wronged Sita has become Miss Mayo, the earlier wronged Vall (a Non-Aryan) was born as Aurangzeb (a Turanian) to chastise and humiliate Rama's worshippers, by pulling down their temples by putting a price on their worship, and so on. Indeed if Karma's law is sure in its operation, one may well believe that Nemesis has overtaken and will overtake in some such ways the worshippers of an alien assassinating wife-deserting, and Sndra lynching King-God (By 'Sndra lynching' I am alluding to the next episode in which a Sndra named Sambuka is decapitated by Rama for trenching upon a privilege of the Twice-born)

Also, it may be noted the Mayo story above sounds not unlike one of our folktales which seeks to explain how the European race which now rules over India and the best part of the Earth came to do so. It is related that the Divine Ramachandra when about to leave this world, promised the Monkeys those devoted allies of His, that as a reward for their magnificent labours for Him, theirs would be the sovereignty of the Earth in the Kali Age. The boon has been fulfilled, for the Europeans of this Age are no other than the Monkeys of the Treta Age! I am not sure that this bit of our folklore does not owe its origin to an attempt (albeit unconscious) to get over the difficulties of Untouchability with the European *Mlechchhas*—necessarily a ticklish problem in dealing with a ruling race. Men may be untouchable, you see, but not monkeys, much less Rama's Monkeys!

erected on the sacrificial ground. Rama was now irrevocably separated from his wife and must soon have become wearied of life and the world.'

This account follows Valmiki's. But later versions, both Sanskrit and Vernacular, add a few more details about the circumstances in which Sita came to be deserted. According to these, her calumniator was a washer man, whose wife had gone away, without asking his permission, to her father's house and had stayed there three days. On her return her husband refused to take her in, saying—'Do you think I am a Rama, who takes back his Sita after she has been living for eleven months in another man's house?' When this came to Rama's ears, he showed his respect for the feelings of his subjects by dismissing Sita, and, instead of punishing the washer man, promoted him to honour.

Such is the episode, which has exercised a strange fascination over most of us Hindus, including (I regret to say) your own self. For, presiding over a political conference of Kathiawar States subjects early in 1925, you advised the Chiefs and their subjects to make 'Rama rajya' their ideal, mentioning in particular, as something worthy of emulation, King Rama's action in abandoning his wife whether in deference to the susceptibilities of his subjects or by way of setting them an example of a husband above reproach.

Now, one general objection to 'Rama rajya' is of course that which is suggested by Campbell Bannerman's famous saying, that 'Good government is no substitute for Self government'. We must never lose sight of the truth that even 'Rama rajya,' the ideal autocracy of our imagination, is no substitute for a real democratic government. A King Rama cannot live for ever; but the 'king's wife'—his realm or nation—lives for ever. The most benevolent despot, when his allotted span is over, will but leave her widowed and helpless.

But let us look into the ethics of the episode in question. Let us judge in the cold light of reason the morality of that particular bit of 'Rama rajya'.

Real chastity, you will allow, is the chastity of the mind. Now a woman, however chaste in that sense,—however great her *patitratya* or wifely devotion to her lord,—may be so unfortunate as to have her person violated by a ruffianly third person. In such a case there can be said to be no fall from real chastity. It is only a false spirituality that can treat such a misfortune as a sin or a crime and punish it accordingly. To punish one for that for which one is not morally responsible is sheer barbarism<sup>1</sup>. Now in Sita's case, there was no question whatever about her mental chastity. Nobody ever doubted that<sup>2</sup>. Then, as regards even the lower or physical chastity, there is evidence enough, as shown above, besides the ordeals that Sita is represented as having miraculously passed through, to show that she had throughout remained inviolate in her person. Her only misfortune was that she had been touched by Ravana in the act of her abduction by him. With the exception of that, if an exception it may at all be said to be, Sita's person was chaste as chaste could be. Even of that slight nominal defilement, her ordeal in Lanka might be regarded as sufficient and more than sufficient purgation. Thus was Sita chaste both in mind and in body<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Lest it be said that it was no punishment that Rama intended in deserting Sita it must be remarked that instead of exiling her alone and helpless to the forest he might have made due provision for her living apart from him in his own kingdom if their separate living was all that Rama wished or thought proper in the circumstances.

<sup>2</sup> As for Rama's chastity the authenticity of the *eka-patnivrata* (strict monogamy) proverbially attributed to him has been impugned by so conservative a critic as Mr. Vaidya who adduces verses from the Valmiki Ramayana which represent Rama as having other wives besides Sita she being only the consecrated queen or head wife of his harem according to him. Vide his Riddle of the Ramayana (1906) ch. III pp. 15 f. and App. Note 1 p. 186.

<sup>3</sup> In an earlier part of his Riddle treating of the birth of Rama etc. to their elderly parents Mr. Vaidya has the following in a footnote:

Talboys Wheeler makes the still more absurd suggestion that Sita had conceived of Ravana, who might have subjected her by force to live with him and that Rama abandoned her again on account of this suspicion. Now Rama could well have marked if Sita was pregnant at the time of her deliverance from captivity.

But what was her fate? Could man's inhumanity to woman be seen in worse light than in this sanctified tale of old? To us Rama worshipping Hindus, Rama's treatment of his wife can only furnish a good excuse, nay, it is a standing incitement, to desert our wives on the ground of their defilement, even though we know that the 'weaker vessels' are not at all to blame morally. As Rama's excuse was to please some of his subjects—to humour even a thoughtless washerman among them, ours would be to please our squeamish caste-fellows or sensitive neighbours

And 'defilement'? Mere contact with a third person as in Sita's case may be 'defilement.' Nay, even *indirect* contact would seem to constitute defilement. For I have read of a case which occurred in Malabar some eight years ago, when a Nambudiri woman was ostracised because she was held to be defiled through such contact. A male servant of her family had come home from the bazar with a load on his head and called aloud at the door for somebody within to come and help to relieve him. As there happened to be no one in the house then, who was able to do so, but the woman, she had to go out and help him to lower the load by holding and supporting it on one side while the man held and supported it on the other side in the act of lowering it. Here, therefore, no actual contact between their persons, but only a 'mediate contact' (so to say) through the load, had taken place. Yet the woman was held to be defiled and was driven out of her caste by means of a *ghatasphota* (chatty breaking) ceremony, symbolising the subject's civil death. No wonder, this woman eventually found an asylum in the Mopla (Malabar Muslim) community.

In defence of Rama's action in abandoning Sita, some have argued that for him on that occasion there

Nay he could have made himself sure on the point by watching the time of her delivery if there was any doubt on the point. It is strange that such wild theories should find a place in the work of such a great historian as Talboys Wheeler. We for our part think for reasons stated in the text that it does not at all seem surprising that the union of such a loving pair as Rama and Sita after a painful and anxious separation should be followed by the birth of not one but two sons. (Pp 114-5)

was a conflict of duties, and that between his duty as king to his subjects and his duty as husband to his wife, he made his choice in favour of the former. Generally speaking, it is only on a narrow or partial view of 'duty' that there may be said to arise what we call a conflict of duties. Now in this case, even supposing Rama's position as ruler of his people made his case materially different from that of a private person in similar circumstances, one would think his position as ruler required him to enlighten his subjects out of their prejudices, and not to humour them—the more so when he knew they were so unreasonable as in Sita's case. King Rama, as soon as he was apprised of the feelings of some of his subjects against his living with his abducted wife, could have called a council of his chief subjects (*Pauras*), as his father and he himself are said to have done on important occasions, and laying before them the facts as he knew them, he could have at least asked them to judge, and offered, in case their verdict was unfavourable to Sita, to retire *along with her* to the forest, to which in fact he consigned her alone, playing in the act a cruel, ungentlemanly (un Kshatriya like) trick on her. If his subjects did not like him to be their king while he lived with his wife, so devoted and chaste yet so unreasonably aspersed by some of them, as he knew her to be, he might have offered to abdicate, and asked them to choose another person in his place or make any other arrangement they liked for the government of their kingdom. Now, even on such a formal occasion as the choice and investiture of his heir apparent, King Dasaratha (Rama's father) is said to have called and consulted a council of his chief subjects (*Pauras*). King Rama could have done like him on the grave and critical occasion on which he is said to have been confronted with a conflict of duties and proceeded to act in the obvious way suggested above. He did nothing of the kind, but made his own decision on the spur of the moment, called all his brothers together to let them know his will and pleasure, which they were warned not to counter on any account. While he professed to be willing to give up even his life to satisfy his people, he gave up only his wife to retain his kudos with

them. He thus sacrificed an innocent woman at the altar of his own prestige—a false, demoralising prestige as King Rama in fact behaved, if we are to believe the story, neither as a good king nor as a good husband, but as a weak, unprincipled ruler and a too jealous, ungentlemanly husband. Rama wanting his Sita to be 'like Caesar's wife above suspicion' (even above unreasonable suspicion), thought fit (like the ancient rulers of Rome beguiling their Roman populace with the gladiatorial combats of their slaves) 'to make a Roman holiday' with her wretched life—and why?—to please the people!

Now, if the susceptibilities of a people or a section were alone to be considered, no reform of a bad but popular custom would be possible; no custom like *Sati*, infanticide or slavery could be abolished, nor should a Sarda Act be thought of to mitigate the evils of child marriage and enforced widowhood.

When Amir Amanullah Khan of Afghanistan, like the enlightened ruler he was during the latter part of his reign, allowed his wife to go without the purdah and the bigoted mullahs amongst his benighted subjects threatened to raise a revolt against him unless, among other things, he divorced his wife, the Amir chose to abdicate and go into exile along with his wife rather than sacrifice his wife and his principles to the fanatic clamour of his ignorant subjects. Does not this recent ruler's conduct in that respect strike you as far more manly or more honourable than the conduct ascribed to 'God's avatar,' King Rama of ancient Ayodhya, in regard to his wife Sita?

It may also be noted that King Rama's conduct towards his wife contrasts unfavourably with King Janamejaya's. It is related that at an Asvamedha sacrifice he had been conducting, Janamejaya found his queen violated by Indra, lord of the gods, and was therefore minded to put her away. He was, however, prevailed upon by the priests not to do so.

Rama's treatment of his wife would also seem to go against a Smṛiti text as follows बलान्तरी प्रमुक्ता वा चोर-



भुक्ता तथापि वा । न त्याज्या दूषिता नारी नास्यास्त्यागो विधी-  
यते ॥ इत्यादि : । (According to the law-giver Atri, "whether ravished by force or enjoyed by stealth, a woman dishonoured need not be abandoned, her abandonment is not ordained")

Romesh Chunder Dutt, the noted scholar, administrator, and President of our National Congress, outlining the story of the Ramayana in his monumental work entitled "A History of Civilization in Ancient India, based on Sanscrit Literature," characterises Rama, who "sent poor, suffering Sita—then gone with child—to exile," as having been "as weak as his father had been", and further on, after sketching the last scene of the episode, viz that of Rama's union with his twin sons, he says

"But there was no joy in store for Sita. The people's suspicions could not be allayed, and Rama was *too weak to act against his people*. The earth which had given poor Sita birth yawned and received its long suffering child. The Vedic conception of Sita, as the field furrow, manifests itself in the Epic in this incident. But to the millions of Hindus, Sita is a real human character, a pattern of female virtue and self abnegation. To this day Hindus hesitate to call their female children by the name of Sita, for if her greatness, her virtue, her uncomplaining devotion, and her unconquerable love for her lord, were more than human, her sufferings and woes too were more than usually fall to the lot of woman. There is not a Hindu woman in the length and breadth of India to whom the story of suffering Sita is not known, and to whom her character is not a model to strive after and to imitate. And Rama too, though *scarcely equal to Sita in the worth of character*, has been a model to men for his truth, his obedience, and piety <sup>1</sup> (Vol I, ed of 1889 90, pp 217 8. The italics are mine.)

<sup>1</sup> From this estimate of his character reservations surely must be made for his treatment of Vali and Sambuka as well as Sita. (Dutt unfortunately does not touch upon the Sambuka episode and passes over the crucial part of the Vali episode.)

## THE SAMBUKA EPISODE.

The story of Sambuka is briefly as follows

During King Rama's reign there were no premature deaths in his kingdom. It happened, however, that a certain Brahman's son met with an untimely end. The bereaved father carried his body to the gate of the king's palace, and placing it there, cried aloud and bitterly reproached Rama for the death of his son, saying that it must be the consequence of some sin committed within his realm, and that the king himself was guilty if he did not punish it, and finally threatened to end his life there by sitting *dharma* (hunger striking) against Rama unless his son was restored to life. Rama thereupon consulted his council of eight learned Rishis, and Narada amongst them told Rama that some Sudra among his subjects must have been performing *tapasya* (ascetic exercises), and thereby going against *Dharma* (sacred law), for according to it the practice of *tapasya* was proper to the Twice born alone, while the duty of the Sudras consisted only in the service of the Twice-born. Rama was thus convinced that it was the sin committed by a Sudra in transgressing *Dharma* in that manner, which was responsible for the death of the Brahman boy. So, Rama mounted his aerial car and scoured the countryside for the culprit. At last, in a wild region far away to the south, he espied a man practising rigorous austerities of a certain kind. He approached the man, and—with no more ado than to enquire of him and inform himself that he was a Sudra, by name Sambuka, who was practising *tapasya* with a view to going to heaven in his own earthly person, and without so much as a warning, expostulation or the like addressed to him,—cut off his head. And lo and behold! that very moment the dead Brahman boy in distant Ayodhya began to breathe again. Here in the wilds the gods rained flowers on the king from their joy at his having prevented a Sudra from gaining admission to their celestial abode through the power of the *tapasya* he had no right to perform. They also appeared before Rama and congratulated him on his deed. In answer to his prayer to them to revive the dead Brahman boy lying at

the palace gate in Ayodhya, they informed him that he had already come to life. They then departed. Rama thence proceeded to the *asrama* (which was nearby) of the sage Agastya, who commended the step he had taken with Sambuka, and presented him with a divine bracelet. Rama then returned to his capital.<sup>1</sup>

Such is the episode, into the ethics of which it would perhaps be idle for us to go, were it merely a piece of old world mythology, of interest only to antiquarians studying the remains of a past civilization. But the story, far from being anything of the kind, has an intimate bearing on our present day life. It is a sample of the 'Rama rajya' for which our orthodox are clamouring, and about which they leave us in no doubt as to what they mean by it. The story forms a regular part of the Ramayanic cycle, which itself forms part of the current religion of the Hindu masses and classes. It is *not* the case that our epic and puranic tales are to Hindudom what the Greek, Roman and Teutonic myths are to Christendom—mere food for its scholars. As Sister Nivedita observed, those tales mean far more to us Hindus than the Gospel stories or Bible legends ever meant to Christian believers in the West. Our mythology in fact continues profoundly to influence our social life for good or ill.

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<sup>1</sup> It was not the practice of *Sannyasa* (i.e. the renunciation of wordly life as the last stage of the religious life) which constituted the transgression of Dharma on the Sudra's part in this story as is popularly believed. In the Valmiki Ramayana (Uttarakanda ch. 74 *et seq.*) only *tapasya* is mentioned in this connection. As to *tapasya*, most of the Rishis we read of in the Epics etc. practised it while yet in the *grihasthasrama* or householder's stage and some even before. *Tapasya* therefore does not necessarily involve *sannyasa* and it is the latter which is specifically forbidden to the Sudras in our books of sacred law. But whether it was the one or the other whose practice constituted the sin in Sambuka's case and whether *tapasya* also is banned to Sudras in those books or not, the merits of the question rationally considered will be the same. Both *sannyasa* and *tapasya* are morally harmless occupations.

In some versions of this story there is no Narada to diagnose the trouble for King Rama before he starts on his mission, but there is instead an incorporeal voice which names the culprit to him straight off and directs him to his execution.

Now, taking the above story, one cannot hope that the miraculous element (i.e. what strikes one as physically impossible) in it will deter our orthodox from laying hold of the plain moral of it. They have cherished and will cherish the ideology peculiar to it. They have tried and will try to enforce that ideology in their social relations. They may not expect a modern Rama to be able to revive a dead Brahman boy, but they will certainly expect him to punish—even with capital punishment—the 'offence' of a modern Sambuka 'usurping any of the functions reserved to the Twice-born viz the wearing of the sacred thread, reading or listening to the scriptures, and the like. As for the miraculous part of the story they will complacently refer it either to the divine personality of Rama or to the particular time of its occurrence, such things being thought to be possible in the more spiritual yugas previous to this. But the non miraculous part they will maintain, is applicable to all times and binding on all men.

There is a pretty story of a fowler named Arjunaka and an old Brahman woman named Gautami told by Bhishma to Yudhishtira in the Mahabharata (Anusasana p., ch. 1). Gautami's young and only son had died from the bite of a serpent and she was bewailing her loss when Arjunaka the fowler coming to know it, pursued the serpent and caught him and taking him to the sorrowing mother asked her how he might kill the wicked creature. Gautami said to him: "Oh do not kill him. My boy has met with such a death because of his own Karma, and I too have lost him owing to my own Karma. The serpent is not to blame. He is only the instrument of Karma's working. Let him therefore go." That suggests how King Rama of Ayodhya might have said to his Brahman complainant: "The boy must have died so young because of his own Karma be it evil or good<sup>1</sup> or of thine own evil Karma. O sorrowing father. It cannot be that this misfortune has befallen thee because of the sin of

<sup>1</sup> For 'to die young' is not necessarily to be thought of as a misfortune so far as the dead one only is concerned. Those whom the gods love die young—such actually was a saying among the Greeks.

another person. It would not be just to think, or to act on the thought, that the sin of one of my subjects was visited on another. Every one enjoys or suffers through his own merit or demerit. But if thou wishest that thy son should live longer than he has done, thou canst part with a portion of thy store of religious merit (*punya*) unto him, as I have heard some Rishis have done on such occasions, and so raise him up through thy Brahmanic power (*Brahma tejas*), if thou art a true Brahman. As for me, I can visit no third person with vicarious punishment for the loss of thy son. If I do, I shall be setting a miserable example to kings and Brahmans alike.' He might have said so, but he does nothing of the kind, and while he, a king and avatar of God on Earth, truckles to a hysterical Brahman subject of his in so intolerant a fashion as to go and behead an inoffensive Sudra subject, we have on the other hand, in the above story, the example of a mere woman who, it may be said, knows and follows the godly way without being an avatar of God.

I am aware that your position on this question is that the Rama of your faith and devotion—the perfect avatar of God—was incapable of killing Sambuka, or of killing, for that matter, even Ravana, because it would be *ahimsa* to kill even a real evil-doer like him, and that indeed the villain of the epic is not what he is generally believed to be, viz. an actual being of flesh and blood, however different in some respects from the common run of mortals, with his ten heads etc., but that he is to be taken only as a personification of moral evil. Such an interpretation of a character in the story, I daresay, may be all right by itself. Though thereby the story itself would lose most of its human interest, that is another matter, and though consistency would demand that once you make Ravana a spiritual abstraction, you make all the other characters in the story, even Rama and Sita spiritual abstractions, too, wholly and solely,—that perhaps is a conclusion you are prepared to accept. But after all, what matters is not what *you* make of these characters, but what the generality of our people think, and their religious mentors teach, about them, and it is with respect to *their* belief and teaching that I expect you to give them a piece

of your mind, and impress on them with all the force of moral authority that you (and only you) can command, (1) that *if a real person named Rama killed a real person named Sambuka in the circumstances narrated in the Ramayana, then the act was wrong and indefensible*, and (2) that *Sambuka's memory should be honoured as that of a martyr for religious liberty, just as we honour Rama's for his filial piety, valour and resource.*

Only if we can do that, and in so far as we are prepared to do that, I believe, can we be *Hindus*, instead of such and such castemen. If religious toleration is not to be a mockery with us, if freedom of religion is to be something more than a mere name among us, we are bound to exonerate the memory of Sambuka and to pay our homage to him as to one of our earliest known religious martyrs; if only because we have been honouring—nay, worshipping as an avatar of God—his persecutor Rama. I say, let it be counted as a 'Rishi rina' to honour Sambuka's memory as that of one of the earliest asserters of religious liberty among Hindus. If Hindudom is not to submerge under the advancing tide of more democratic faiths,<sup>2</sup> to which it has already lost a great part of itself,

<sup>1</sup> *I. e.*, the debt we owe the Rishis, being one of the three spiritual debts mentioned in the Sastras

<sup>2</sup> *I. e.*, more democratic in their polity, within their own folds at any rate. As for us Hindus, we feel and act for our castes, rarely or never for our community. Hindus in fact have little or no 'Hindu sense'. Their fanaticism generally is of the foolish, suicidal sort, while that of their rivals is of the self aggrandising, homicidal kind. Thus, if an 'Untouchable' Hindu enters a public temple, however reverentially,—you will find the 'Touchable' Hindus resenting it more than if a non-Hindu enters the same (even though the non-Hindu happen to have been born an 'Untouchable Hindu') and perhaps even if he deliberately defiles or damages the temple. In places where Brahman Non-Brahman troubles are rife it has been noticed that when a Non Brahman Hindu is insulted by a non Hindu fanatic, his Brahman neighbours chuckle over it, and that when a Brahman is ill used by a non Hindu, the Non Brahmins are inclined to say 'Well served!' It is not without significance that the ancient Hindu literature contains names for the several Hindu castes but none for all the Hindus as one community. It may sound paradoxical, but it is none the less true, that it is the Mahomedans who have made us Hindus! This seems to me as self-evident as that the British made us all Indians ('Hindis'), instead of Hindus, Mussalmans etc.—or Gujaratis, Bengalis, etc.

and if Rama's name is not to be erased altogether from the tablets of our revering hearts, we are bound, in my humble opinion, to rehabilitate the poor old half forgotten 'devil' of Sambuka and accord him all the honours of a religious martyr

In the history of religions such a radical change in outlook if it takes place, will not be without precedents or parallels. The same heroic woman, Joan of Arc, who had been condemned to be burned at the stake as a witch in league with Satan by the bigoted hierarchy of the Christian Churches during the Dark ages of Europe, was only a few years ago elevated to Sainthood by the same hierarchy under the influence of these our more enlightened and less intolerant times. The same may be the case with Sambuka. At least it ought to be the case soon enough, if Hinduism is to live and be a force for good.

To take another instance of such a revolution in religious ideas. The practice of *Niyoga* was once enjoined as a sacred duty among the Hindus, much as Levirate was among the Hebrews. Obviously it had its origin in times when woman, looked upon only as a field to raise seed to the owner, could be the object alike of polyandrous and polygamous unions (as in the case of the Pandavas and of Sri Krishna himself respectively). But somehow what had once been a sacred duty came later to be reprobated as sinful, as well among the Hindus as among the Semites.

Similarly, while today so many of us are inclined to think highly of King Rama for the treatment he gave his wife, and make him out to be an ideal king in spite of his lynching a Sudra subject,—tomorrow with the dawning of a better sense among us we are bound to consider both Sita and Sambuka as good martyrs as ever were, and to regard Rama the worse for his part in martyrising them. It is up to you, Mahatma, to lead this revolution in our religious ideas.

If it be asked how we could honour both Rama and Sambuka at the same time I say. Do we not venerate equally as avatars of Vishnu both Rama of Ayodhya and his namesake of the Axe (*Parasu Rama*), who, we are told, from being a Brahman, took to soldiering and launched out on a career of indiscriminate vengeance against the

Kshatriyas till he was worsted and sent about his proper business of *tapasya* by the later and more famous avatar from Ayodhya? We do. When that is the case, there is no reason why our recognition of Sambuka's martyrdom, though it may derogate from Rama's Godhood, should be held particularly to conflict with it.

### 'SAMBUKA" AND SUBTERFUGES

Now, attempts have been made in some quarters (unsuccessfully, in my opinion) to prove that the Sambuka episode is one of the latest interpolations in the Ramayana. Even if it were so, the fact would remain that the story has been there, accepted by our people through long centuries without demur. To orthodox readers of the epic, it is as good a part as any other, of a semi-inspired work. Secondly, while some of the chapters of the epic as we have it today are found marked "*prakshipta*" ('*e*', interpolated) in the old copies or noted as such by the old commentators, we have to note that the chapters devoted to the Sambuka episode are *not* among them. So the fact stands, and cannot be denied, that the story, understood in its obvious literal sense, has been a part of the orthodox Hindu tradition for long centuries, without Orthodoxy thinking any the worse of Rama for his part as depicted in it. The story may be a comparatively late importation into the original epic. It may be made to bear a special meaning. It may have put upon it some construction graver than the plain one, or at any rate *less objectionable* than the obvious one. It may be discovered to be a parable pregnant with some exquisite mystical import. It may be any or all of these things, for aught we know. Yet I repeat, what matters and must be of concern to us is the fact that the vast mass of Hindus does take the story in its plain literal sense and has been doing so for very many centuries, commending Rama and denouncing Sambuka for their parts as portrayed in it. And whether the story as we have it in the Ramayana today be wholly a myth, or whether it embody some historical fact, the moral which the story was originally meant to convey is plain as plain can be and—what is more—almost all who are traditionally learned among Hindus are satisfied with that moral.



112 that Hindus who are of Sudra birth commit a mortal sin in performing certain religious acts equally with other Hindus, and that the King of the State is bound to punish the former to preserve inviolate the monopoly of the latter

## "SAMBUKA" AND LATER AUTHORS

However, it would be interesting to see how some of the later Sanskrit poets and dramatists have handled the episode I can only refer to two of them here

Bhavabhuti, in Act II of his drama entitled *Uttara-Rama-charita* or 'The Latter Part of Rama's Life', is constrained to put into the mouth of his hero, while he is on the point of cutting off Sambuka's head, one or two self-condemnatory expressions, suggesting that the step that he was going to take with the ascetic was on a par with his cruel treatment of his wife Rama, in fact, is made to say that he who was capable of such heartless conduct towards Sita in her advanced pregnancy was fully equal to his contemplated treatment of the Sudra However, the impression left on the mind of the reader after all is that for a king in his position it was a very unpleasant duty, but a duty all the same And Rama himself, after cutting off the wretch's head, is in doubt whether the Sudra's death will give life to the dead Brahman boy<sup>1</sup> As soon as his head is severed from his body, Sambuka's soul takes form as a celestial person, by reason not of his *tapasya* but of his having come into contact with the Divine Rama, and then follows a long conversation between the two about nothing in particular

Kalidasa in his poem *Raghuvamsha* ('The Dynasty of Raghu',—XV 42 et seq) is gracious enough to send the soul of the wretched Sambuka to 'the region of the

<sup>1</sup> According to the Valmiki Ramayana also such would seem to be the case for in it King Rama after executing the ascetic requests it as a boon of the gods who have appeared before him to congratulate him on his deed that the dead Brahman boy lying in his capital be graciously restored to life which would show that the King himself was not confident beforehand that the operation he had undertaken to perform would automatically restore the delicate balance of his subjects' lives

blest' And this is as his old commentator Mallinatha explains, in accordance with the teaching of Manu,<sup>1</sup> that the soul of a criminal, once he gets duly punished by the king for his offence, enjoys after his death the same spiritual status that the soul of a holy person attains to after his. Manu seems to have dangled this happy prospect of the other world before the criminals of his time in order to induce them the sooner to give themselves up to justice little thinking what discouragement it must be to the real holy ones to offer them for their laboriously pious lives the same reward as he was offering to the crooks for their spicy, adventurous lives,—and (more than that) what encouragement it must be to would be crooks to offer them such a tempting short-cut to heaven they had only to carry out their nefarious designs, get punished with death or lesser punishment (no death for Brahmans), and heaven was insured!

Be that as it may, both authors' solid denunciation of Sambuka for his presumption in encroaching upon a privilege of the Twice-born, followed by the airy consolation to him as to his fate in the next world reminds me of a passage in the Bhagavad-Gita where certain classes forming by far the greater part of society, are called names but a happy prospect is held out to them in the other world, on condition of their taking refuge in the Lord. I shall come to this passage further on.

The Mahabharata, also in one place briefly and casually alludes to the Sambuka episode but it is to be regretted that its reference to Rama's part in it is laudatory of him and not the reverse as in the case of its allusion to the Vali episode noted before. We read. It is heard that a Sudra named Sambuka having been slain and righteousness having been upheld by Rama of true prowess, a Brahman's son was restored to life.

<sup>1</sup> VIII 318

<sup>2</sup> Santi p. ch. 153 v. 67. It appears that a variant reading in the text here gives the name of the Sudra ascetic as Jambuka instead of the usual Sambuka.

## THE EKALAVYA EPISODE.

The story of Ekalavya is as follows

When the young Kaurava and Pandava princes were given in charge of their preceptor Drona for instruction in all military arts, 'kings and princes hearing reports of his skill and desirous of learning the science of arms flocked to Drona by thousands. Amongst those that came there (to Hastinapura) was a prince named Ekalavya, who was the son of Hiranyadhanus, king of the Nishadas (a non Aryan tribe). Drona, however, cognisant of all the rules of morality, accepted not the prince as his pupil in archery, seeing that he was a Nishada who might (in time) excel all his high born pupils. But the Nishada prince, touching Drona's feet with bent head, wended into the forest, and there he made a clay image of Drona, and began to worship it respectfully, as if it were his real preceptor, and practise weapons before it with the most rigid regularity.

While he was thus practising he is said to have, in the dual role of preceptor and pupil, addressed questions to himself and answered them himself. We have here a grand old example of what modern educationists might call 'self teaching by the heuristic method'. But the narrative proceeds

'In consequence of his exceptional reverence for his preceptor and of his devotion also to his purpose, all the three processes of fixing arrow on the bowstring aiming, and letting off shafts became very easy for him.

'And one day the Kuru and Pandava princes with Drona's leave set out in their cars on a hunting excursion. A servant followed the party at leisure with the usual implements and a dog. Having come to the woods they wandered about, intent on the purpose they had in view. Meanwhile, the dog also in wandering alone in the woods came upon the Nishada prince (Ekalavya). And beholding the Nishada of dark hue, of body besmeared with filth dressed in black and bearing matted locks on head the dog began to bark aloud.

Thereupon the Nishada prince, desirous of exhibiting his lightness of hand, sent seven arrows into its mouth (before it could shut it). The dog thus pierced with seven arrows, came back to the Pandavas. And those heroes, beholding that sight, were filled with wonder. And, ashamed of their own skill, they began to praise the lightness of hand and precision of aim by auricular perception (exhibited by the unknown archer). And they thereupon began to seek in those woods for the unknown dweller therein (that had shown such skill). And . . . the Pandavas soon found out the object of their search ceaselessly discharging arrows from the bow. And beholding that man of grim visage, who was totally a stranger to them, they asked,—“Who art thou, and whose son?” Thus questioned the man replied,—“Ye heroes, I am the son of Hiranyadhanus, king of the Nishadas. Know me also for a pupil of Drona, labouring for the mastery of the art of arms.”

‘. The Pandavas then, having made themselves acquainted with everything connected with him, returned (to the city), and going unto Drona, told him of that wonderful feat of archery which they had witnessed in the woods. But Arjuna, in particular, thinking all the while of Ekalavya, saw Drona in private, and relying upon his preceptor’s affection for him, said,—“Thou hadst lovingly told me, clasping me to thy bosom, that no pupil of thine should be equal to me. Why then is there a pupil of thine, the mighty son of the Nishada king, superior to me?”

‘. On hearing those words, Drona reflected for a moment, and resolving upon the course of action he should follow, took Arjuna with him and went unto the Nishada prince. And he beheld Ekalavya with body besmeared with filth, matted locks (on head), clad in rags, hearing a bow in hand and ceaselessly shooting arrows therefrom. And when Ekalavya saw Drona approaching towards him, he went a few steps forward, and touched his feet and prostrated himself on the ground. And the son of the Nishada king worshipping

Drona, duly represented himself as his pupil, and clasping his hands in reverence stood before him (awaiting his commands) Then Drona addressed Ekalavya, saying "If, O hero, thou art really my pupil, give me then my fee" On hearing these words, Ekalavya was very much gratified, and said in reply,— "O illustrious preceptor, what shall I give? Command me, for there is nothing, O foremost of all persons conversant with the Vedas, that I may not give unto my preceptor" Drona answered—"O Ekalavya, if thou art really intent on making me a gift, I should like then to have the thumb of thy right hand"

Hearing these cruel words of Drona, who had asked of him his thumb as tuition fee, Ekalavya, ever devoted to truth and desirous also of keeping his promise, with a cheerful face and an unaffected heart, cut off without ado his thumb, and gave it unto Drona After this, when the Nishada prince began once more to shoot with the help of his remaining fingers, he found that he had lost his former lightness of hand And at this Arjuna became happy, the fever (of jealousy) having left him

(From the Mahabharata Adip., ch 134,—P C Roy's trans)

I have characterised this story at the outset as one which sanctifies racialism you notice the talk of 'morality' in justification of a Brahman (for Drona was one, though he took to arms and commanded the Kaurava forces in the final war) denying a non-Aryan applicant the instruction he desired, and the smug satisfaction of the narrator at the success of the ruse employed to deprive even a self taught archer (for Ekalavya was really such) of the benefit of his hard acquired art

The story recalls what we read about the early years of the East India Company's rule in Bengal, how the weavers there were obliged to cut off their own thumbs to escape the 'sweating' they were forced into by their foreign taskmasters May we not regard this latter oppression as Nemesis for the former? If there be any difference in significance between the two cases, one would

think it was in favour of the modern one. No English writer I am aware of defends his countrymen's conduct as having been dictated by 'Christianity' or the like. On the contrary, some Englishmen seem to be so far ashamed of that part of their history that they are inclined to deny altogether the truth of it. That may be hypocrisy, but as hypocrisy is said to be the homage which vice pays to virtue, it at least is not open to the charge of debasing the moral currency—a charge that must be levelled against a work reputed holy, such as the Mahabharata, which defends Drona's odious racialism as having been dictated by 'the rules of morality', and has no word to utter in condemnation of the trick played on poor Ekalavya.<sup>1</sup>

In the Puranas we constantly find that erroneous actions, even trifling mistakes or such as are due to inadvertence, are represented as meeting with their own retributions either in the same life or in a next, and, conversely, that mishaps or sufferings undergone are ascribed to some previous wrong action on the part of the sufferer. For example, Sita's confinement by Ravana in the Asoka garden it is said, was due to the curse of a parrot in her childhood. The bird, we are told, lived in a golden cage and was fondly petted by her, yet, being denied the freedom which it most desired, and without which it languished in spite of all the loving care of its young mistress it cursed her that she would suffer confinement like itself. That was why, it is said, Sita apparently innocent as she was, came to suffer confinement at Ravana's hands. Next, Yudhishtira who on account of his exemplary life on earth was we are told privileged to enter heaven with his own earthly body, had however, to suffer the loss of a toe for his lapse on one occasion. (See the footnote 1 on p 5.) In view of such legends, the absence of mention of any retribution to the wrong-doer (or, of

<sup>1</sup> The word cruel used to describe Drona's demand for the thumb of his pupil is no indication that it was disapproved. The epithet can be taken as intended simply to describe the effect of the demand on the victimised pupil without reflecting on the jealous preceptor just as a hero engaged in lawful warfare may be described as delivering a fierce charge or hurling a cruel taunt at his adversaries without reflecting on the hero.

previous wrong on the part of the wronged one) in the case of Drona's treatment of Ekalavya, as well as in the other cases we have been considering, becomes only too ominous. It betokens a grave defect in our 'spiritual heritage'. I should think it was high time for us to acknowledge the fact in sincerity and make amends for it. At least, to sing praises of "Rama raja" with such blots on its escutcheon unwashed, ignored, or even admired is not the way to make amends. The necessary amends must be willingly made, or they will be exacted from us with compound interest.

## THE VAMANA AVATAR LEGEND

The story of the Vamana avatar is briefly as follows.

Bali, king of the *dasyas* and grandson of Pralhada, the great devotee of Vishnu, wished to attain Indra hood (the headship of the gods), and entered upon a course of one hundred sacrifices for the purpose. He completed ninety nine and was going through the hundredth, when the gods being alarmed prayed to Vishnu to balk Bali of his reward. Vishnu took avatar (or incarnated) as the son of Vasyapa and Aditi in the form of a Dwarf (*Vamana*). He assumed the dress of a mendicant, and having gone to Bali who was engaged in the sacrifice, prayed him to give him as much space as he could cover in three steps. Bali, who was noted for his liberality, unhesitatingly acceded to this apparently simple request. But the Dwarf soon assumed a mighty form and began to measure the three steps. The first step covered the earth, the second the heavens, and not knowing where to place the third, he planted it on the head of Bali, bound him with Varuna's cords like a felon, and finally sent him down to *Patala* (Hades), whose entrance Vishnu is said still to guard, lest Bali come out of his confinement therein.

I bring this story to your notice, particularly because there occurs, as I believe, an allusion to it in glorification of the avatar in one of the devotional pieces that make up your *Ashram Bhajanavali* (Psalmody). Whether it is there or not, I hope you will agree with me that the story, taken in the obvious sense in which it is usually as well as

traditionally taken (and no other sense is worth while for our purpose) represents Vishnu as a trickster and as one unjustly partial to the gods against their cousins, the daityas.<sup>1</sup>

## ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION.

Now let us consider the question as to the correct interpretation to be put upon the passages which bear upon such episodes, in our sacred and quasi-sacred literature. For myself, there is no doubt that they are so many 'skeletons in the cupboard' of our heritage. But some of those to whom that position is unacceptable have a way of their own in regard to interpretation. I therefore venture a few remarks on it.

We all know that you interpret the story of the bloody Mahabharata war as an allegory depicting the eternal conflict between the passions and the virtues of mankind, not as a story of any material warfare at all. Now, about a year ago, while speaking at Muttra or Brindaban—those reputed scenes of Sri Krishna's boyhood—you were naturally moved to picture the condition of the land, as it was in His time, full of glad cowherds and cows, and flowing with milk and honey, and so forth. Contrasting the same with the condition of the land as you then saw it, you deplored the extreme paucity and the miserable specimens of the cattle there and the consequent dearness of milk in

<sup>1</sup> Such is also the opinion of a group of Shastris responsible for the latest and most exhaustive edition (in Marathi) of the *Śrīmad-Bhagavata*, wherein the story occupies chapters 15 to 23 of Book VIII. (The comments occur near the end of Vol. V of the edition, which is published by Damodar Savakaram & Co. of Bombay.)

Also, the words put into the mouth of God Vishnu before the incarnation, reassuring the suppliant Aditi, the mother of the gods, to this effect: "When thy sons will have cut down their rivals in the fray, gladly wouldst thou witness the lamentations of their widows," are characterised by the learned editors as expressing a sentiment, utterly unchivalrous and hard hearted, that is unfortunately too often met with in secular Sanskrit literature. It is, as they remark, one thing to represent a favourably shown character in your story as dealing destruction to his wicked enemies and joying over it, but it is another, and a most barbarous, thing to represent him as gloating over the sorrows of their innocent widows.



a region sacred to the memory of the Divine Cowherd. On reading the report of your speech in the papers, a friend (a great admirer of yours) humorously remarked, in view of your allegorical way of interpreting the epic themes, as follows

'The people whom Mahatmaji lectured there (in Muttra or Brindaban) might well have retorted "Well, Gandhiji, the Divine Krishna's 'cows' were not cows in the literal or physical sense, but they were only doctrines of philosophy. Is it not said in the *Gita mahatmya* that 'all the Upanishads are cows,' that 'the Gladdener of the cowherds (<sup>१</sup> *śrī*, Krishna) is their milker', that 'Arjuna is the calf' and that 'any wise man is the drinker of the milk (which is) the great nectar like Gita'?"—Then, are not some of us in these holy places styled Gosains or Gosvamis ('Lords of kine'), not because we keep any cattle, but because we are expected to be masters of our senses only, as 'go' means a sense-organ, as well as a cow? Therefore, Gandhiji, by Sri Krishna's 'cows' you should understand, not the milk giving animals that we usually mean by the word, but certain high metaphysical truths"

So you see, it is a case of 'In for a penny, in for a pound' If we may allegorise, where shall we stop? We cannot allegorise away only the inconvenient parts. If we are to allegorise only certain passages because they are unacceptable to us in their plain literal significance, we cannot in justice deny the same privilege to others to explain away those which are unacceptable to *them*. In fact, if we are to allegorise our ancient narratives, we should allegorise the whole, and not only a part, of them. And if that is done, all their human value evaporates. The Divine Cowherd of Brindaban becomes the head of a school of dry as-dust philosophers and Arjuna, the mighty yet scrupulous warrior, becomes only the head boy or monitor of that school, who has a case of conscience to propound to the conductor of the 'chariot' of the school,

<sup>१</sup> सर्वापनिषदो गावो दोग्धा गोपालनंदन . ।

पार्थो वत्स : सुधीर्भोक्ता दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत् ॥

Prof Krishna, while he is driving (or 'coaching') his pupil through the 'Kurukshetra' of a course of casuistry *cum* metaphysics<sup>1</sup>

Now, it may be asked if we are to take everything in those works literally, are we to believe that Ravana had ten heads, and all the other seeming absurdities in them? The answer is It is not that *we* are to believe any of the miraculous things narrated in those works, but we are certainly entitled to believe that the *authors* of those works believed, or wished their readers to believe, those things. The question really is not what *we* are to believe, but what the authors themselves may be supposed to have believed, or wished their readers to believe. And in determining this, the obvious literal sense (which is also most often that which is handed down to us in an unbroken, uncontradicted, popular tradition) is *prima facie* a safer guide than any allegorical sophistications, for these might be due after all to our desire to hold with the ancient 'bare' (of which we moderns cannot bring ourselves wholly to approve) and to run at the same time with the modern 'hounds' (which our more enlightened hearts are after)

## THE MASSES AND THEIR MENTORS

Be that as it may, what matters today in this connection is neither what *you* believe, with your allegorical interpretation (calculated to denude the sacred texts of their human interest as well as their undesirable content), nor what *I* believe, with my literal interpretation,<sup>1</sup> but with a rationalistic view (often the same as yours) as to the morality or immorality, the acceptability or unacceptability of a given example or a given precept of our ancients. What matters at present is what the orthodox Hindu masses believe, and are taught to believe by their accredited mentors

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<sup>1</sup> Literal interpretation does not preclude but rather requires that words which are clearly or expressly used in their figurative senses in particular contexts should be understood in such senses in those contexts. This follows from the ordinary rules of grammar and rhetoric applicable to all literature secular or sacred modern or ancient.

One of these—the Swami of a certain Math in these parts, apparently not uncontaminated by modern education—in the course of a sermon published in a leading Kanarese monthly, has held up for admiration Rama's decapitation of the Sudra ascetic, and even the editor of a Marathi and a Hindi monthly in Maharashtra, with distinct Arya-Samajist leanings, has thought fit to defend that deed in his papers. What have you to say to these? Of course, we Hindus are not an independent nation, as the Afghans are; or, I fear, for one Ahmediyya (or 'Qadiani') stoned to death in Kabul for heresy, there might have been hundreds of Untouchables lynched in Nasik and Poona and Jalgaon for encroaching upon the privileges of the Twice-born in recent years.

Even a nationalist of repute like Babu Har Dayal Nag, writing in disparagement of the 'ungodly culture' of the West and in glorification of our own 'spiritual culture', has gone the length of praising Ramachandra because he "went to the length of exiling his beloved wife Sita to please the people, although he was assured of her innocence" (*The Bombay Chronicle* 26-12-'28). Well, all I can say to this is, the awakened womanhood of India may justly fear a Swaraj manned by such 'spiritual' politicians who actually encourage wife desertion 'to please the people'. Awakened Hindu womanhood may well ask: What guarantee is there that such 'spiritual' politicians will scruple, when they have the power, to revive in the name of the ancient ideal of *pativrata* the practice of Sati now banned by the 'ungodly' British,—to say nothing of the 'spiritual' requirements of child marriage sought to be interfered with by the Sarda Act?

### REFORMER V. SAINT.

Mahatmaj, I remember you had once an occasion to discuss some aspects of the Ramayanic story in answer to a Hindi correspondent who had asked you how you could reconcile your partiality for Tulsidas's Ramayan with that author's narrowness of vision and hidebound conventionalism, as shown by his ungenerous expressions about women in general, and his blind acquiescence in, if

not belauding of, those actions which our conscience bids us regard as blots on the escutcheon of the Ramayanic hero<sup>1</sup>. You then contented yourself with remarking that Tulsidas, being a Saint and not a Reformer, reflected only the view of his own age, implying thereby that a Saint as he was, he could not (or did not need to) rise above contemporary ideas, however erroneous or inequitable. That raises the elementary question whether a person can be, or deserves to be called, a Saint, if he is so blind a follower of custom as to acquiesce in or belaud an action, only because it has been acquiesced in and belauded by his predecessors and is acquiesced in and belauded by his contemporaries. Can he be called a Saint, whose conscience does not revolt at a manifest evil whenever and wherever he sees it, and not only does not revolt at it but actually praises the evil as good? When the question is thus put, I have little doubt that you will answer it in the negative. And also I hope, you will agree with me, when you come to think of it, that every 'Saint' worth the name is bound to be a Reformer, unless by 'Saint' you mean merely an other worldly devotee, or a recluse intent upon his own salvation, with no thought of social service, flying from his fellows yet depending upon them for his livelihood,—thus leading at best a harmless, though essentially selfish, existence. Of such Saints, I may say, the less we have, the better—both for our souls and for our bodies.

### MAN V. AVATAR.

Now we need not go further into the merits and responsibilities of an author like 'Saint' Tulsidas, handling not his own theme but one traditionally handed down to him. More to the purpose is the consideration of the social effect and implications of the tradition itself. When we regard a character such as King Rama of Ayodhya as an avatar of God, or call him God Himself (as you once did), do you not see that we thereby take away much or all of the value

<sup>1</sup> It was I think in an article of yours in *Navaajirani* reproduced or summarised in *Young India* about Oct. 1929

of his good example for us as human beings? All the 'godly' actions of God's avatar must have been pre ordained by God Himself, and hence all the events of the avatar period could be foreseen and controlled in advance by Him,—a thing beyond the power of ordinary mortals. And therefore, ordinary mortals, it is said, should not presume to follow the gods.<sup>1</sup> In the next place, by making Rama God's avatar, we give divine sanction to the three dark deeds in his career, and make it sacrilegious even to doubt the morality or equity of those actions. You thus see that there is a two fold harm in representing our ancient great as Gods or avatars of God: we reduce the influence of their good, and enhance the potentiality of their evil example. The scandals of the Vallabhacharya cult associated with Sri Krishna's dalliance with the Gopis are well known, but no Vallabhacharya is known to have run to the rescue of a Draupadi in distress. He will only excommunicate her if she has been dishonoured by anybody but himself.

## SOME 'SACRED' TEXTS

There is one other way of dealing with time honoured texts which happen to be repugnant to our sense of humanity and equity. We are told that such texts only record the customs of the times in which they were composed. Well I should say, looking to all the circumstances, that is hardly honest. If the authors of those texts wanted only to record the existence of certain customs—bad as they appear to us of this age, and bad as they should appear to every reflective, impartial mind of any age,—then it was open to those authors to do so and in the same breath to *condemn their continuance*. This

<sup>1</sup> 'न देववरितं चरेत्।' The argument that a person divinely great can afford to do certain deeds which common mortals shall not venture upon with safety to themselves or to the community can of course be countered by the argument that if such super men had need to do those deeds (apparently against the dictates of orthodox custom) much more will frail humanity need to do them. (Cf. the almost proverbial saying as a retort to the charge of Sabbath breaking: 'The better the day the better the deed'.)

they have not dooe, and not only have they not done it but on the contrary, all things point to the fact that they wished those bad customs to continue. For one thiog, it is the Potential or the Imperative verb-form that they use in that connection 'One *should* do this,' 'One *should not* do that,' or 'Do thou this,' 'Do not thou do that', and not the present tense form 'They do so-and-so', as they might have put it if they were only recording the existence of contemporary customs. And for another, they invoke curses and prescribe sanctions for any violation of those 'customs'. On the other hand, where they wish to recognise the existence of a custom, however strongly prevalent, and at the same time wish to disapprove of it, they say so in express terms. An instance of this may be found in Manu, III 31, IX 197 and III 51, where the taking of *sulla* or bride's price is recognised as a custom but condemned at the same time. They could, if they would, follow the same way in the matter of all other 'customs' which appear to us to be bad or indefensible. They have however, not done so. Hence the excuse that they were merely recording the then existing customs falls to the ground. The fact is that in thus glossing over inconvenient sacred texts we only betray, as in the case of the allegorical mode of interpretation, our own dubious desire to hold with the hare of ancient Authority in the shape of these texts and to run at the same time with the hounds of modern Enlightenment, namely, our Reason and Conscience.

Now for some examples of such 'sacred' texts

The earliest work we have of the class of works called Smritis or Dharma sastras is that of Gautama, which is in the form of sutras. According to it, a Sudra who has reviled a Twice-born man or assaulted him with blows must lose the limb with which he has offended while he himself may be abused by a Brahman with impunity. And in this same context occurs the notorious injunction 'If a Sudra listens intentionally to a recitation of the Veda, his ears shall be stopped with some molten tin or lac. If he recites Vedic texts, his tongue shall be cut out. If he remembers them, his body shall be split in twain' (XII 1 13)

In his great work already cited (p 14) Romesh Babu after mentioning some of these 'sacred' texts ventures to doubt whether such atrociously draconic and differential laws were ever literally carried out<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere in the same work, after quoting Manu (VIII 268-271) to the effect that if a Sudra mentioned the names and castes of the Twice born with contumely, an iron nail ten fingers long should be thrust red hot into his mouth, the author remarks. "Of course it must not be supposed that the actual administration of the law was ever so barbarous, or that even Brahman judges ever disgraced themselves by inflicting such monstrous punishments on Sudras who in a moment of anger used harsh words towards Brahman Brahman have painted themselves much worse than they really were"<sup>2</sup>

His doubt about the actual enforcement of laws like the above may do credit to his kindly heart, but can hardly lessen the black guilt of the heartless legislators bent upon frightfulness to safeguard their monopolistic power Moreover, that the doubt, although kindly meant is not strictly warranted is seen from the testimony of Alberuni,<sup>3</sup> who is quoted by Romesh Babu himself towards the end of his work as follows

"Every action which is considered as the privilege of a Brahman, such as saying prayers, the recitation of the Veda, and offering sacrifices to the fire, is forbidden to him to such a degree that when, e g, a Sudra or a Vaisya<sup>4</sup> is proved to have recited the Veda,—he is accused by the Brahman before the ruler, and the latter will order his tongue to be cut off"

<sup>1</sup> Dutt op cit Vol II p 43

<sup>2</sup> Id vol III p 189

<sup>3</sup> This learned and observant Arab born in Turkestan and once a prisoner of war of Mahmud of Ghazni was the author of an encyclopaedic work of which the part relating to India was written by him after extensive travels in the country and a course of Sanskrit study at Benares probably He died in 1048

<sup>4</sup> The Vaisyas had by then we are told been deprived of their Twice-born status

<sup>5</sup> Alberuni ch 64 —Dutt op cit vol III p 479 80

Let it not be said that I am only recounting 'old, unhappy, far-off things'

Only in 1928 (March-April) you yourself noticed in *Young India* the case of the Baghat State (which is a Hindu ruled State near Simla), wherein the State authorities persecuted the members of a Hindu agriculturist caste known as Kolis for their daring to put on the 'sacred thread', which they had done as Vaisyas under Arya Samajist auspices. The authorities' action was in the direct line of the Manu tradition, they could plead, if they would, the sanction of Manu's Dharma-sastra,<sup>1</sup> which enjoins on rulers the duty of corporally punishing their subjects who dare to wear the distinctive marks (as the sacred thread) of the 'Twice-born'—by which term, according to some other Sastras, the Brahmans alone are meant in this latter part of the Kali age.<sup>2</sup>

The Baghat case also well shows how the 'Rama rajya' that you preach to our princes and people—no doubt, in your own special sense—they are only too apt to understand and enforce in *their* own sense, which is the traditional sense. The Kolis of the Baghat State were in fact so many Sambukas, who but for this sinful Kali age and the Satanic British raj, might have received their passports to heaven at the hands of the State authorities.

## SANCTIFIED INEQUALITIES

By the sacred laws of Manu and the rest, punishments for offences generally were graded both according to the caste of the offender and according to the caste of the aggrieved. The lower the caste of the offender, the heavier the punishment ordained for him and also, the higher the caste of the aggrieved party, the greater the

<sup>1</sup> IX 974

<sup>2</sup> It is said that at the present time all Hindus are Sudras by their subjection to the British rulers. If so the Sudras proper are doubly Sudras—Sudras to the higher castes and along with them Sudras to the British just as the subjects of our Feudatory States are said to be doubly slaves—slaves to their chiefs and slaves to the British. Surely this aspect of it should not be lost sight of.



punishment to the offender<sup>1</sup> Even the rate of interest on loans was graded according to the caste of the borrower the higher his caste, the lower the rate<sup>2</sup> Mutilation and capital punishment (by comparatively humane methods and also by causing to be drowned, burnt, roasted, devoured by wild beasts, dragged by cattle, etc.) were provided for very many offences but Brahmans were exempt from them, as also from all taxation,<sup>3</sup> and even if they were banished, their wealth was not to be confiscated<sup>4</sup> 'Never shall the king slay a Brahman, though convicted of all possible crimes let him banish the offender from his realm, but with all his property secure, and his body unhurt No greater crime is known on earth than slaying a Brahman, and the king, therefore, must not even form in his mind an idea of killing a priest' So teaches the Divine Manu,<sup>5</sup> and commentators make it out to be a mortal sin to kill a Brahman even in self-defence, or in defence of one's property or the honour of one's wife

Lest any one should think that all these were laws of long, long ago, I might here note the facts that in the Hindu ruled State of Kashmir, Brahmans and Rajputs were exempt from capital punishment till only three years ago, and that in the Hindu kingdom of Nepal the law still exempts Brahmans from the death penalty I am not sure that there are not many other States in India today where the law still continues to be such

Should any one think that the Brahman's immunities and privileges were after all a reward or a security for the invaluable store of learning he used to carry with him, all doubt would be set at rest by this assertion of the Divine Law giver "A Brahman, whether learned or ignorant, is a powerful divinity, even as fire is a powerful

<sup>1</sup> Manu chapter VIII verses 268 to 38<sup>n</sup> with one sensible exception at 336 338

<sup>2</sup> Manu VIII 140 14<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Manu VII 133

<sup>4</sup> Manu IX 241

<sup>5</sup> Manu VIII 380 I

divinity whether consecrated or secular . . . Although Brahmans employ themselves in all sorts of mean occupation, they must invariably be honoured, for they are something transcendently divine” Such a dictum is naturally followed by precepts that recommend the priestly casteman in certain circumstances to usurp the military casteman’s function—to take the law into his own hands, in fact ! It is not surprising, therefore, that we should find Manu empowering priests to steal and rob for pious purposes ! ( XI 11-17 )

A precept of the same Law-giver’s ( VIII. 394 ) whereby, not only priests, but whoever give liberally to them are required to be exempted from taxation, may be said to invite corruption of the priesthood by laymen wishing to evade payment of their dues to the state

Also, according to Manu, a Brahman could make a Sudra, whether bought or unbought, do servile work for him, for the Sudra ‘was created by the Self-existent to be the slave of a Brahman’ ( VII 413 ) On this our historian exclaims “Never was the name of the Self-existent taken to sanctify a baser and more iniquitous institution !”

Dutt was probably not aware of another Law-giver who declares, almost in the same breath, that there is nothing more repulsive to God than the recitation of the Vedas by the Sudra, and that the best way to attain salvation is to worship God in real faith<sup>1</sup> or he might have remarked “Never was a more repulsive God set up and preached by a more unctuous votary !” However, for downright contempt for fellow men couched in revolting language, it would be hard to find a parallel, I am afraid, in all literature—secular or ‘sacred’—to the following in Manu “A Brahman, if he take a Sudra woman to his bed ( as his first wife ), sinks to the regions of torment, for, the crime of him who thus drinks the moisture of a Sudra woman’s lips, who is tainted by her breath, and

<sup>1</sup> IX 31-9

<sup>2</sup> Dutt, *Op cit* Vol III p 19\*

<sup>3</sup> *Vṛiddha Gāṇḍama* XXII.

who even begets a child on her body, the law declares no expiation."<sup>1</sup> While thus the *marriage* of a Sudra woman (however worthy) by a Brahman is, according to Manu, too bad for any expiation, the *murder* of a Sudra (whether male or female) by a Brahman requires, according to the same Law-giver, no greater expiation than that which is prescribed for 'the killing of a cat, a mongoose, a blue jay, a frog, a dog, an iguana, an owl or a crow.' (XI. 132.) It means that a Sudra's life was for Manu as cheap as that of a cat etc. !

"Adultery was punished according to the caste of the woman dishonoured, and Yajnavalkya lays down the iniquitous law that adultery with a woman of a lower caste is not punishable ! (II, 291.)<sup>2</sup> Similarly a fine is considered a sufficient punishment for deflowering a Buddhist nun ! (II, 296 )<sup>3</sup> . . . . If one strikes one of a superior caste, he should be mutilated ; if he abuses such a person, his tongue should be cut out ; if he pretends to instruct such a person, hot oil should be dropped into his mouth ( *Vishnu*, V, 19, 23 & 24 ).<sup>4</sup> If one who should not be touched defiles a twice-born man by touching him he should be put to death. ( *Vishnu* V, 104. )" "It may safely be asserted that such inhuman laws were never enforced even by Brahman judges," optimistically speculates Romesh Babu. "But the presence of these laws in the Institutes is an indelible stain, which the caste system has thrown, on the Hindu legal literature and on the Hindu nation "<sup>5</sup>

"Less heinous than the *mahapatakas* [mortal sins] are the *upapatakas* [secondary sins], among which we find . . . curiously enough, 'superintending mines or factories and executing great mechanical works',<sup>6</sup> which, according to commentators, means constructing dams or

<sup>1</sup> III 17-19

<sup>2</sup> In the Bombay recension of *Yajnavalkya*—II 288

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* —II 293

<sup>4</sup> Cf Manu, VIII 270 272 and 279

<sup>5</sup> *Op cit*, Vol III, pp 342-3

<sup>6</sup> Manu, IX 60-67.

making great machines like sugar mills and the like " "The caste-system in India" comments Dutt, "had the baneful result of degrading arts and industries and all men engaged in them, but it is with regret and pain that a Hindu writer notes that mechanical works were actually classed with sins" <sup>1</sup>

But all these ideas, I suppose, are implicit in 'Rama rajya' as understood by our orthodox. For, are we not told about a predecessor of King Rama's, that his subjects 'never departed even by a hair's breadth from the path trodden out for them since the time of Manu' <sup>2</sup> However, in the words of the historian, "orthodox Hindus, who quote the laws of Manu and the supposed immutability of Hindu customs against all social progress, may be gently reminded that the time is gone by when great mechanical works could be punished as a sin when *Janina* boys [i.e. those begotten on unmarried girls] could be recognized as sons,<sup>3</sup> or when the blasphemy could be uttered that the Sudra 'was created by the Self-existent to be the slave of a Brahman'" <sup>4</sup>

Of our sacrosanct inequalities many were 'steam rolled' by the Mahomedan conquest, and British rule has been levelling the rest. Yet some of them persist, and all are apparently cherished by those who expect to enjoy the sweet side of a 'Rama rajya' based on caste discrimination and women's subjection.

I remember, when a copy of the *Manu-Smriti* was ceremonially burnt in Tamil nad about four years ago by a body of Hindus who called themselves (I think) the Self Respect League, a Nationalist leader of high standing in that province, while condemning their gesture and putting in an elaborate plea for old Manu, used words which implied that Manu's system of differential punishments could be defended on the ground that for the same offence

<sup>1</sup> *Op cit* People's edition (1899) vol. II p 117 In the previous edition cited before the wording is slightly different and rather more bitter (Vol III pp 197-5)

<sup>2</sup> *RagAuramisa* I 17

<sup>3</sup> The reference is to Manu IX. 17<sup>o</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Dutt *op cit* (1890), Vol. III pp 200-201

punishment awarded in a certain measure to an offender of a higher status is harsher in its effect than the same awarded to one of a lower status. The Manu phil evidently forgot what is equally true—and seems to have been glimpsed by Manu himself in one place<sup>1</sup>—that an offence committed by one of a higher status is a graver offence than the same committed by one of a lower status, since the former must be presumed to be more knowing and less easily tempted or provoked to err than the latter, and that, therefore, the same punishment that is said to be harsher in effect to the higher status offender is fully deserved by him owing to the graver character of what is *ex hypothesi* the same offence. Hence, if there was to be any discrimination, it ought to have been the other way about—in favour of the lower-status offender, he being the less knowing and more easily tempted person of the two. If a modern educated person like the Nationalist in question is found to betray such a weakness for the Manu-Smṛiti on its worst side, no wonder that Sankaracharyas and meo of that ilk should make a dead set for 'Rama rajya', with its sanctification of wife-desertion, Sudra lynching and all

## THE PRIESTS AND THE PEOPLE

Romesh Babu in his History, after mentioning several sections of the Hindu society which are, as such, either disqualified for ritual purposes or stigmatised in various connections in the body of the Manu Smṛiti, thus sums up the position

"This is a pretty comprehensive list! If we exclude physicians, shop-keepers, singers, actors, trainers of animals, bird fanciers, instructors in arms, architects, oil manufacturers, carpenters, washermen, hunters, gold smiths, blacksmiths, manufacturers of baskets and arms, all artisans, all shepherds, all agriculturists, who then are left in the nation to receive honour? PRIESTS and KINGS!"

He then moralises as follows

"The results were disastrous, so far as arts were concerned. Genius was impossible, except among priests

and kings. Men held in a perpetual moral bondage and servitude never learnt to aspire after greatness and glory. Men to whom honour was impossible never learnt to deserve honour and distinction. In other countries a Cincinnatus might leave his plough and wield the destinies of his nation, or a Robert Burns might give expression to a nation's sentiments in thoughts that breathe and words that burn, but in India the cultivator's fate was sealed, he could never break through the adamant wall of social rule. Among other people a sculptor, a painter or an architect, like Phœdrias or Praxiteles, like Raphael or Michael Angelo, might by the force of his genius win the highest honour in his country. But in India that highest honour was the exclusive privilege of the Brahman and the Kshatriya, honour to an architect or to a sculptor was simply out of the question. Under healthier influences the humblest artisan or engineer might rise to be a Watt or a Stevenson, but in India the artisan and the engineer were chained by shackles of steel, which it was impossible for them to break. Held in comparative degradation and contempt the artisan and the mechanic never learnt to soar beyond the fixed rules of their art, and gave no indications of a great idea, a bold conception, a new invention or an original genius. Hindu architects covered India from Orissa and Ellora to Tanjore and Rameswaram with temples and edifices of which we shall speak in a future chapter. The patience, the industry, the attention to minute details, the ingenuity, and the skill displayed in these works will bear comparison with those of any nation, ancient or modern, on the face of the earth. But the conception of a great architect, the genius of a true artist is often wanting in these magnificent edifices. A Brahman poet in Ujjayini has conceived a Sakuntala in verse, but there is no Sakuntala in stone among the millions of sculptured figures in India.

"By her position and her civilisation India should have been the mistress of the Indian Ocean, as Greece and Rome were of the Mediterranean, and a Hindu

mercantile navy should have swept the seas from China to Egypt. But the genius of Brahmans and Kshatriyas did not descend to the art of navigation, civilized India depended on the rude Arabians for commerce with the West and the imperfect maritime communication which the Hindus had with Sumatra, Java and China in the Buddhist period,—as we know from Fa Hian's pages,—was soon forgotten, and it was considered a sin to cross the seas. Hindu genius struggled, against the dishonour cast on arts,—Hindu architects and sculptors, and goldsmiths and weavers attained all that it was possible to attain by skill and industry and ingenuity and long training but the genius which marks the literature and thought of ancient India is absent in her industrial arts, her mechanical inventions and her maritime enterprise.

"No nation has such just reasons to be proud of its past as the Hindus. But the proudest nations of the earth are at the same time those who are the most keenly alive to their shortcomings, and most eagerly assiduous in removing them, and greatness does not long survive where such endeavour is wanting. India too has had shortcomings, and it is necessary that we should remember them and seek to remove them. And we should never forget that monopoly is hurtful to those who hold it, as to those who are excluded from it and that a monopoly of learning and honour is the worst kind of monopoly that the world has known. The nation is degraded under a permanent social subjection, and then drags down the monopolists in the common national ruin."<sup>1</sup>

The historian, however, does not spare the *people*. He justly blames them, and blames them equally, if not more, for their weakness in allowing themselves to be hypnotised into their slave-mentality by the hereditary monopolists. "Superficial and impulsive writers often hold the Brahmans of India to blame for monopolizing religious

<sup>1</sup> *Op cit* Vol. III pp 146-9. The references are always to the earlier edition of 1889, 20 unless otherwise stated.

knowledge and observances, and creating a harmful and permanent disunion in the nation. The charge, however, is unphilosophical and unjust. Priestly supremacy and royal despotism are inevitable when the people become enervated and feeble, and are incapable of taking 'care of their conscience or their political rights. Priests and kings are no more responsible for these results than the people themselves, indeed, the former are less responsible for assuming undue authority than the latter for submitting to such authority. Such chains are received ungrudgingly by a feeble and lifeless people when the people awake to life and vigour, the chains fall asunder."<sup>1</sup> The Non Brahmin and Adi Hindu movements of our day surely represent such awakening of the people.

Again, while treating of the latter part of what he calls the Pauranic Period, when "the bold myth was proclaimed that the Kshatriyas too as a caste had, like the Vaisyas ceased to exist that all who were not Brahmans were Sudras—all equally incapable of reciting the Veda and sacrificing to the fire," Romesh Babu observes

"It is an old story, at least in Indian history—the ascendancy of *priests* has kept pace with the steady degeneracy of the *people*. And the people, we repeat once more, are more responsible for their degradation and submission to priestly authority than the priests for assuming such authority. The people have to thank themselves for their social degradation and dishonour in the past, and they alone, by their own exertions, can secure an equality in status, in honour and in rights, in the future."<sup>2</sup>

As to how and in what respects the slave-mentality was injected into the people, the following passages from the same work are of profound interest. I need hardly offer any apology for reproducing them here except to say that they are not only illuminating in themselves but are also the more valuable in that they are found to be either entirely omitted or woefully curtailed

<sup>1</sup> *Op cit* Vol I pp 231 5

<sup>2</sup> *Op cit* Vol. III. pp. 480 1.



in the edition now available of the work. They deal with the Dharma sastras of what is termed the Pauranik Period.

"Rules are laid down for the most minute acts and movements of the student during this stage [*brahma charyasrama* or studentship], and the elaboration of the rules is indeed carried to a degree which provokes a smile in the modern reader. But it is not merely for the training of students and for the performance of religious ceremonies that such absurdly detailed rules were laid down. Similar rules were recorded for the guidance of every man in every action of his daily life. It would appear that the writers of the Dharma Sastras revelled in the power which they obtained over the actions of the people, they multiplied rules and regulations beyond the conception of ordinary mortals, and they condescended to give no reasons for the rules their *ipse dixit* was law. Nations were treated worse than children: they must ask no reason, exercise no discretion of their own, show no signs of independent judgment, but act just as they were told to act, for thus it was laid down in texts. The texts were followed even when they were silly or harmful, so long as the Hindus remained steeped in ignorance under the Musalman rule. The texts are now unfortunately disobeyed, even when they are rational and beneficial. For modern Hindus demand a reason and not the *ipse dixit* of men however ancient and holy.

"It is impossible to convey by quotations any idea how rules were multiplied, for such passages are numerous and fill all the Dharma Sastras. One passage is just as good as another and we quote a passage at random. Dakṣha tells us that one should wash his hands and feet after returning from a bath in some tank or river. The matter is very simple and Hindus of all nations (i.e. provincial divisions or castes) might be trusted to use their discretion in this matter. But no—the legislator must lay down laws in such a matter as this. And the laws are grotesque enough.

" '14 After washing the feet and hands, one should carefully examine the water and drink it three times, then he should wipe his mouth twice with the root of the thumb, somewhat bent

" '15 Having thus wiped the mouth, three times he should wipe his feet and touch the different parts of his body

" '16 He should then touch his nose by the forefinger joined to the thumb, and then he should repeatedly rub his eyes and ears with the thumb joined with the middle finger

" '17 Then with his thumb and little finger he should touch his navel, and with the palm of his hand he should touch his chest. Then with all the fingers he should touch the head, and then with the ends of his fingers he should touch his arms ' "

"Rules multiplied in this manner defeat their own object. They seek to bind down the people in all their acts and movements, but they end by being disregarded even in their most essential points. Such has been the natural fate of the Dharma Sastras in modern times " <sup>1</sup>

So much about the rules of ceremonial conduct. About the degrading hypnotism exercised by a monopolistic hereditary priesthood, the following excerpts dealing with the same period are eloquent

"Yajnavalkya's work is one of the earliest of the Dharma Sastras, and indeed belongs, as we have stated before, to the 4th or 5th century A D and is therefore nearer in point of time to Manu than to Parasara and Vyasa. But nevertheless we find in Yajnavalkya, (as indeed we found in Manu himself), an undeserved contempt for all honest trades and professions. In a passage which we have referred to before, Yajnavalkya (I, 160 to 165) condemns a large class of professions as impure. It is with pain that the historian of the Hindus finds in this passage all mechanical arts, trades and industries classed with

<sup>1</sup> *Op cit.*, Vol. III pp 338-340

prostitution and crime ... .[Here follows a long enumeration in which misers, thieves, prostitutes, drunkards, backbiters etc., as well as unfortunates like eunuchs and diseased men, are indiscriminately mixed up with physicians, king's officers, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, weavers, dyers, washermen, oil manufacturers, leather workers, actors, sellers of arms etc.] How many honest trades do we find in this list of despised professions! How could mechanical arts and industries flourish in a land where workers in leather, goldsmiths and blacksmiths, weavers and dyers, washermen and oil manufacturers were condemned as impure? And who,—we ask again,—are reserved for honour in this common degradation of all national arts and industries?—Priests alone!"

The enumeration, however, as the historian conjectures, is not one of castes, but of classes and professions, the latter of which must have crystallized into absolute castes some time later; for "prostitutes, thieves and backbiters could not be castes, and goldsmiths and blacksmiths too, who are classed with them, could not be meant as castes."

After citing from other Law givers of the same period "a few more passages showing how honest trades and mechanical arts were held in contempt," passages in which widow marriages (but not widower marriages), sea voyages, and (curiously enough) the cultivation of and trading in indigo are also condemned, the historian proceeds

"While mechanics and artisans and traders were thus generally held in disrespect, there were certain professions and also certain classes apparently of the aboriginal races which were held as specially vile and impure .[Here follow a number of citations]

"Thus while the aboriginal races were still regarded by the Hindus with undeserved and unmitigated contempt, and even while respectable and honest professions and industries followed by Vaisyas were unhonoured and degraded, the exaltation and glorification

of the priestly class knew no 'hounds' A few old verses to the effect that unlearned Brahmans should not be honoured or fed still continued to be quoted, but these were completely lost in the extravagant laudation of the priestly caste which fills the later Dharma Sastras A volume of moderate size could be filled with such fulsome and often grotesque adulation but we can only make room for a few flowers of rhetoric from this literary parterre'

"The vast and limitless distance between Brahmans and Sudras is insisted on in the later Dharma Sastras with all the emphasis that language can supply Terrible are the effects of ordinary social intercourse with Sudras, language or the knowledge of the writer fails to describe these effects' 'I do not know', says Parasara, 'what different births are undergone by the twice born who is nourished by the Sudra's food' He becomes a vulture in twelve repeated births, (then) a pig in ten repeated births, (then) a dog in seven repeated births,—so said Manu. And if a Brahman sacrifices for a Sudra, that Brahman becomes a Sudra and the Sudra becomes a Brahman' (*Parasara* XII, 33 to 35) History, at least in modern times, does not record another instance of civilized men holding their brethren of the same country and nation in such utter and undisguised abhorrence Surely the noble lessons of Gantama Buddha must have been completely erased from the memory of the great Hindu nation when Hindus could speak thus of their brethren who had lived with them, fought by them, spoken with them the same tongue, and followed with them the same customs and laws for three thousand years' The caste system in India has much to answer for, but its worst and most lamentable result is this permanent breach and disunion where there should have been fusion and union, this weakness and death where there should have been national strength and life

"While the poor Sudra is despised, degraded and reviled, the Brahman's glory and prowess know no bounds Offend not Brahmans, but beware of their wrath.

'Kings punish with their weapons, but Brahmans punish with their wrath, a weapon kills one man, but a Brahman's wrath destroys a family. Vislinu strikes with his disc, but Brahmans strike with their wrath; that wrath is more deadly than the disc, wherefore offend not a Brahman' (*Brhaspati* 49-50)

"'8 Death does not approach that man who offers to Brahmans water to wash their feet, a place to rest their feet, and light and food and shelter

"'9 As long as the ground of one's house remains moist with the water with which Brahmans have washed their feet, so long his ancestors drink nectar from holy cups

"'10 The merit that is reaped by the gift of a reddish cow at the full moon of Kartika, the same merit is reaped, O chief among Rishis' by washing the feet of Brahmans'

"'11. When a Brahmin is welcomed, the god Agni is pleased, when a seat is offered to a Brahman, Indra is pleased, when his feet are washed, the deceased ancestors are pleased, and when food is offered to him, Prajapati is pleased.

"'12. The Ganges and cows are holier than one's parents, but *there is nothing holier than a Brahman and there will be nothing holier*' (*Vyasa* IV)

"It is needless to extract other passages 'Charity to Brahmans', says Professor Krishna Kamala Bhatta charya,' one of the profoundest Sanskrit scholars in Bengal, 'is a constant theme of a goodly portion of our religious writings', and '*much of what is now practised as part of Hindu religion but furnishes occasions for making gifts to the priestly class*'" (*Joint Hindu family Tagore Law Lectures*, 1884-5 Pp 95 & 96) <sup>1</sup> Such prostitution of a noble and ancient religion is manifest in every modern rite that we perform, every modern religious work that we take up Satatapa, for instance, enumerates a long list of diseases and sins,

<sup>1</sup> This is Dutt's footnote. The *Italics* in the quotation are also his.

calamities and misfortunes, and prescribes gifts to Brahmans as a remedy for all! He prescribes the worship of various golden images of various deities in order that those images may be given to Brahmans. Elsewhere in the Dharma Sastras we are told that the food grains in a house holder's house become instinct with joy, when a Brahman approaches, at the prospect of being given away to such Brahman!

'There is much in this style in the Puranic Dharma Sastras which will provoke a smile in the modern reader. But these passages have a sad lesson to teach. They teach us that a hereditary priesthood, however learned and pious and even self denying, unconsciously and even unwillingly come to imbibe all the vices of monopolists, and become grasping and covetous, jealous and exclusive. They teach us that a nation in surrendering its conscience and religious liberty, surrenders also its national unity and life. They teach us that all trades and professions, all useful arts and honest industries, become degraded when the artisans and mechanics and labourers, i. e., the nation at large, bow down before hereditary priests and wash their feet. They speak more eloquently than the impassioned strictures of a Luther or the keen sarcasm of a Voltaire against the domination of priests and the slavery of nations. And they tell us that if the great Hindu nation,—the sons of Vaisyas and Kshatriyas alike—have in the modern day been deprived of their ancient heritage of religious learning and reduced to the common level of Sudras, it is because they chose to surrender their consciences and then their religious and social liberty to the custody of hereditary priests!'

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<sup>1</sup> In the later ("People's") edition of the work, all this portion has been compressed into three or four sentences, beautifully though at the cost of interesting details as follows

"The caste-system which unduly exalted the powers and privileges of priests had the inevitable result of degrading all honest trades and industries other than that of priests. [and] in its later phase has served a two fold object. It has served to divide the nation and create mutual ill feeling. And it has served to degrade the nation in order to exalt the priests." (Edition of 1899 vol. II, p. 19)

"And the Dharma Sastras do not speak in vain Young India takes note of the past and shapes his [sic] future accordingly Already under the blessings of a healthy education, Sudras and Brahmans and the sons of the ancient Vaisyas have learnt to work on a common platform for a common native land. Vaisya and Brahman and Sudra have also learnt to mix socially, they attend the same schools and learn the same lessons together; they travel in the same railway carriage or steamer, and often take their meals together; and they attend the same offices and follow the same professions in life These are hopeful signs,<sup>1</sup> for united work breeds mutual understanding and real union More than this, Brahmans themselves have been the foremost in this century to efface unhealthy distinctions, and have nobly striven to reunite and to save, and the names of Ram Mohan Roy and of Dayanand Sarasvati will live in the grateful recollections of the Hindus in centuries to come, when the tribe of capacious and pigmy opponents to progress will be deservedly forgotten."

Remarkable alike for historical insight and philosophical introspection, though wanting in ethical judgment, is the following passage occurring in an earlier part of the work

"Sages and legislators are excellent judges of the laws and institutions which are most conducive to progress in their own times but no laws and institutions can be made permanent and immutable without interfering with the natural progress of a society capable of advancement in successive ages Rigid and inflexible social rules,

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<sup>1</sup> This we must allow is a just acknowledgment of the work the Westerner has effected in our midst no matter whether it was wittingly or unwittingly done And the acknowledgment certainly needs to be recalled in these days when patrioteering sentiment is apt to ignore national shortcomings

<sup>2</sup> *Op cit* Vol III pp 317-325 The whole of the last fine moralising paragraph is unfortunately omitted in the People's edition (1899) of the work

therefore, which are further hallowed by the sanction of religion, serve only to hamper and restrain a nation in its onward march in civilization. But the grave error, the national misfortune, should in justice be attributed not to those wise men who framed rules for their own guidance under the conditions of ancient society,<sup>1</sup> but those who, from want of religious energy and of political life, have failed to modify the rules in accordance with the requirements of modern society. Nor would it be philosophical to blame the modern priestly caste for upholding its privileges and maintaining caste inequality. Priestly supremacy is inevitable when the people are superstitious, just as kingly despotism is inevitable when the people are politically lifeless. Nations are themselves to a great extent responsible for their fate, and the people of modern India have to thank themselves for still consenting to wear the broken links of an ancient chain round their necks, and for remaining willing bondsmen to their dethroned priestly masters.”<sup>2</sup>

## THE GITA.

So far we have been noticing the Smritis etc., notorious for their illiberal ideas on caste and the sex. Now the Bhagavad-Gita is a work deservedly famous for its high philosophic tone and lofty conception of man's duty 'here below'. You have called it the solace of your life, and claimed that you find in it "nothing to cavil at". To me also the central teaching of the Gita is invaluable, and I would say that the spirit of the poem as a whole is such as must go to supply just the grit that the Hindu character in the mass seems to need. What a mortifica-

<sup>1</sup> This view cannot but be deemed ethically unsound as regards the unequal laws etc. which the author himself has condemned elsewhere in the work. Besides the laws laid down purport (singly or collectively) to be for all time—many of the most objectionable precepts ending with the refrain *एष धर्मः सनातनः* (Such is the eternal law) so that any change attempted might be regarded as a blasphemy or heresy!

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. II pp. 65-69



tion, then, must it be to a Hindu with democratic sentiments to read in it such a passage as the following!

“Refuging in Me, O Pritha’s son,  
Whoso by birth sinful be—  
Women, Vaisyas, and Sudras as well—  
E’en they attain the Goal supreme.  
What need is then for one to say  
How the holy Brahmans fare,  
And pious saintly Princes, too?  
Thy lot being cast in this,  
A fleeting joyless world,  
Adore thou Me.”<sup>1</sup>

In this passage, you see, certain classes—viz., women and Sudras, who together must comprise much the greater part of any community, and also the Vaisyas, who are here a novel addition to the usual ‘women and Sudras’ placed under so many disabilities in the Smritis and Puranas—are called sinful by birth, and contrasted with certain other classes—viz., Brahmans and Kshatriyas—supposed to be naturally holy ones, and then all alike are vouchsafed the supreme Goal on taking refuge in the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>IX. 32-33.—The first of these couplets cannot bear the interpretation some have put upon it, who take whoso by birth sinful be’ and ‘women, Vaisyas, and Sudras’ as two different categories, for the position of the correlatives ‘ये . . . ते’ (‘whoso . they’) makes it clear that ‘women, Vaisyas, and Sudras’ are *instanced* as those that ‘by birth sinful be’. Even otherwise, how can we dub any class of human beings (other than ‘women, Vaisyas and Sudras’) as sinful by birth? One may be deemed sinful or meritorious by one’s conduct through life. But to regard any one as sinful by birth—why, that is the doctrine at the back of Untouchability and all the rest of the disabilities based upon birth in our social system.

<sup>2</sup>What a pity, by the way, that Mahomedan and Christian males are left out in that offer! Perhaps they all come under ‘Sudras,’ and so, I suppose, there was no need to mention them separately, even if the author of the Gita had foreseen these future inhabitants of his country.

See ante, p. 27, fourth par

These verses, some people think, by vouchsafing salvation alike to those that were supposed to be sinful by birth and to those that were thought to be naturally holy, on the one condition of their having due *bhakti* or devotion to God, embody the democratic principle of equal opportunities for all. I think rather that though the verses promise the same goal to all on the same condition apparently, they start some of the aspirants in the race with an unfair handicap. If a contrast there should have been between the two groups, it might have taken some such form as this: 'With proper devotion to Me those that are (said to be) sinful by birth do attain the supreme Goal, whereas *without* such devotion the others, though (said to be) holy ones, attain it *not*.' That would have been a fairer or a more democratic proposition.

We cannot say that the passage merely represents the view of its human writer under the influence of the age he lived in, without reducing all other passages of the Gita to the same humdrum position, and thereby giving ground to the logical conclusion that the whole of the Gita teaching belongs to a period of civilization which could tolerate and did enforce such ungenerous ideas of 'women, Vaisyas and Sudras' as are expressed in that passage. If it is claimed, as was once done by you,<sup>1</sup> that the passage in question only reflects the prevailing undemocratic sentiment of the particular age when it was composed, implying that the author (or Author) of the Gita should not be charged with having endorsed that sentiment,—well, I ask, what prevented him (or Him) from making that clear, by means of expressions such as 'these classes *wrongly* thought to be sinful by birth'<sup>2</sup>—or at least 'these classes *thought to be*

<sup>1</sup> *Young India*, 12-1-1923, p. 10, col. 2

<sup>2</sup> That such an iconoclastic attitude, where it was called for, would not have been quite foreign to the tenor of the Gita is shown by the nature of the verse I have placed at the head of this letter. Indeed, it would be hard to find in all religious literature any other passage to match that and the next five verses in the Gita, as regards the quiet scepticism and gentle sarcasm they breathe against smug orthodoxy. 'What a specious saying is theirs, who, wise in their own esteem and obsessed by their Vedic lore, O Partha, claim that there is nothing more beside I' and so on.

sinful by birth' ? Then there is the invidious distinction between the two groups—those with the handicap and those without. Surely, if the importance of *bhakti* for salvation irrespective of birth was to be brought out, a contrast between the two groups might have taken the impartial form suggested above.

My unfavourable view of the above passage only receives colour, I am afraid, from another verse in the Gita which is commonly cited nowadays against Untouchability. The verse is the 18th of chapter V—"*Panditas* (the perfectly cultivated) are used to looking with an equal eye upon a Brahman endowed with learning and culture, a bull (or cow), an elephant, a dog and also a 'dog-eater' (literally, 'one who cooks dogs' for food, but taken to signify a member of some degraded outcast tribe that possibly ate dogs! "

Although it is usual to cite this verse in condemnation of Untouchability, Unapproachability, Unshadowability etc., it is discounted both by the orthodox literalists and by rationalist reformers. The former argue, and the latter cannot deny, that in the first place it is 'a counsel of perfection' meant for would be '*panditas*', and that in the next place the way in which two classes of men and three of beasts are mentioned *together*, as equal in the eyes of the '*panditas*', and that too, in an order which places the so called 'dog-eater' (representing our Untouchables etc.) even lower than the dog and the other lower animals, is not without significance. At best, they say, the equality preached in it is of the sort indicated elsewhere in the same poem, where 'a clod of earth, a stone and gold' are said to be alike in the sight of the dispassionate one (XIV 24). In their opinion, therefore, such a citation as the above only proves too much.

To the objection that the several categories mentioned in the verse, viz the Brahman, the bull, the elephant, the dog and the 'dog-eater', may have been mentioned in that order only to suit the requirements of metre, and that thus no particular significance need be attached to the order, the reply was once given on behalf of the

orthodox "Not only should every word of Sastra texts be taken to have been employed after due deliberation, even the position of each word may have a significance and a purpose other and more important than mere metrical exigency. It is patent to every observant reader that the order of categories in this verse ranges from high to low, and that is how the scholium of Shankaracharya also takes them, as being in the descending order of the three 'gunas'—'sattva', 'rajas', and 'tamas'." <sup>1</sup>

That settles the question for the literalists, and, may I add, for the rationalists, too?

So in the light of all this you see, the above passage (IX. 32-33) stands out as clearly undemocratic; and not only is it offensively such in expression, it is also unhealthily pessimistic in tone, with its reference to 'this, a fleeting joyless world'

But it is not the only passage in the Gita which, in my opinion, definitely goes against the claim that there is "nothing to cavil at" in the work. There is at least one other passage (VIII 24, 25), which determines the future of the human soul by the mere time and circumstance of its passing away. One must say that the author of the Gita has here delivered man's soul into the jaws of the astrologer and the soothsayer, or that he has made the destiny of the human soul a sport of the false sciences of astrology and divination. It may also interest you to learn that certain magical or animistic verses in the Gita which declare, among other things, that rain comes from sacrifices (ch III, vv 10-14) have led to or been quoted in defence of, orgies of animal sacrifice offered to the rain-deities in recent years whenever the rains have held off in these parts, and that another verse in the same chapter (v 26) which seems to forbid an enlightened person's trying to change the outlook of ignorant people given to ritual works, has been the strongest weapon in the armoury of our social obscurantists who look askance at all attempts towards popular enlightenment, reform and progress. Verses also there are

<sup>1</sup> A contributor in *The Times of India* 20-1 1925 p 8

in the Gita, like ऊर्ध्वमूलमधः शालमन्त्र्यम्राहुर्व्ययम् ('with roots aloft and boughs adown' etc XV 1) which seem to bear no rational meaning but only a mystical import. The verse near the beginning wherein Arjuna is exhorted to fight in order (at any rate) *to avoid disgrace* (II 34) is on the face of it opposed to those later ones (II 47 et seq) in which we find inculcated the *disinterested* performance of one's duty. Though this may be called hypercriticism I mention it as a likely objection. There are also many verses in the Gita (such as संप्रेष्य नासिकाग्रं स्वम् 'by looking at the tip of one's nose VI 13) prescribing mere physical exercises and laying down dietetic rules which seem to have no bearing on spiritual life as such or (at least) to carry no particular significance spiritually. Lastly it should not be surprising if verses 47 & 48 of ch XVIII were used in defence of hereditary (*śahaja*) criminal pursuits like Thuggee.

## ANCIENT WRITINGS AND MODERN MINDS

In the matter of handling our ancient literature the trouble is that many of us are too prone to argue in this fallacious self-deceptive *a priori* way. Such and such a thing appears to us to be clearly wrong, immoral or untrue. But our ancients were certainly wise and good. Therefore they could not possibly have practised, approved or meant such a thing. Almost in these words I remember you took the part of Pandit S. D. Satavalkar in the controversy he had with Bharatacharya C. V. Vaidya<sup>1</sup> on the question as to whether our Vedic ancestors slaughtered cows and other animals for sacrifice and food<sup>2</sup>. While that is the line we are apt to take inclined as we are to ancestor worship it seems to me that the more helpful as well as self-respecting course for us to take would be to declare that while we venerate all that is good and true (according to our own light) in

<sup>1</sup> So styled because he is a recognised authority on the Bharata or Itihasa period of our history.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, about September 1901. Mr. Vaidya took all unbiassed scholars had maintained the unassailable firmness of the question.

the Sastras, we hold at the same time that "*no scarrant even in the four Vedas can sanctify sacrilege*", as you yourself once said, *nor certify an untruth*, as I would add<sup>1</sup>

A cosmography which represents the Earth as a huge flat cake resting on the hood of a huger Serpent, with the Serpent resting on a yet huger Tortoise, and that Tortoise resting on—Blessedness knows what,—and describes the Earth's surface as covered by seven 'Islands' or concentric belts of land bounded by seas of milk, butter, curds, treacle and wine, as well as one of salt water and one of sweet,—with the sun circling round the Earth's central mountain called Meru, and so on and a legeodry which has been described as 'abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years loog', with other details to suit; these may interest us as the quaint ideas of our ancients speculating in their primitive way about the Universe, its past, present and future. But, no matter what grave esoteric meanings some of us may read into them—meanings at which our ancestors themselves would have been most surprised,—you see that that cosmography and that legeodry are not fit to take the place of our Geography and our History. Those of us who have been contaminated with modern (or 'Western') education either laugh at those myths or cast about for some 'explanation' for them.<sup>2</sup> But none of us is satisfied that the Earth actually rests on the hood of any serpent, or that there are seas of milk etc. on it. How, then, do we satisfy ourselves that it is the duty of a king to desert his wife as soon as he learns that the tongues of some of his little-minded subjects have wagged in idle slander against her: in other words what casuistry is it that can defend, excuse or palliate King Rama's treatment of his wife Sita?

<sup>1</sup> *Young India* 11-6-1927, p. 205

<sup>2</sup> The fact is highly significant that among us it is only those who have come under Western influence (e.g. the Theosophists) that evince any anxiety for some Explanation other than the obvious and traditional one of these myths. Their comfortable explanation (often a special pleading) which to their critical brethren (the rationalistically disposed Hindus) is either a self-deception or a pious fraud is to the rest untouched by modern knowledge almost a blasphemy!

## SLAVE-MENTALITY.

Where a certain action strikes us as being clearly immoral, or a certain statement as being clearly unbelievable, and at the same time a Sastra text is claimed to enjoin or permit that action or to make that statement, the proper attitude that we as rational beings might take in that case would be something like this 'Whoever composed such a work might have been a better man than to have enjoined or permitted such an action which goes against our Conscience,'—or 'he might have known better than to have made such a statement which runs counter to our Reason,'—'but if it is there in the work sure enough, so much the worse for that work,' 'if a King God named Rama is represented as having abandoned his faithful wife or beheaded a dissenting subject, the less Godly a king he must be held for that.' Where such should be the attitude of every self respecting person, the orthodox or dogmatist attitude is the reverse 'Rama was God as well as King, hence, if He did desert His wife Sita or kill His subject Sambuka for a certain reason, the reason must be a sufficient one, and the action Godly enough for us ignorant mortals. And if the conscience of any of us cannot bring itself to approve of it, so much the worse for that conscience.' Now judge where the 'slave-mentality' lies.

It has been the fashion with us for some years now to inveigh against Western civilization and the 'slave-mentality' bred in our 'Western-education' schools. But every fair minded person who knows anything about it will admit

(1) that the intellectual slavery to old world undemocratic notions (or 'ideals'—for they also are ideals of a sort), to which the vast majority of our people cling and of which our Sastras and Pandits, and Maulvis and

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<sup>1</sup> When asked about 1931 how you could reconcile your Non-cooperation activities with your well known reverence for Jesus Christ who by his saying 'Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's' is believed to have forbidden all action against the State you yourself are reported to have remarked that if that was true of him the less a Christ he must be!

Maulanas, with their *pathshalas* and *makhtabs* are the fountain head, is in reality the parent and fosterer of our slavery to Western Imperialism and

(ii) that it is the rationalistic outlook of the modern West alone,<sup>1</sup> that can deliver us from a 'Rama rajya' which, whatever else it may or may not connote, certainly connotes to the mind of our orthodox the twin institutions of Suppressed Castes and Repressed Womanhood as divinely ordained institutions

The best proof of this is the recent 'Varnasrama Dharma Swaraj Sangh Conference', at which orthodox leaders in the name of 'Rama-rajya' denounced both Western civilization and the Indian National Congress (an institution which, be it noted, owes to that civilization both its origin and its inspiration), and banned women, Sudras and Ati Sudras (Untouchables) from some or all of its proceedings,—and (most significant of all) sought and secured the services of the British Government, the present 'Rama rajya' (or Rama's Monkeys' raj,<sup>2</sup> if you will), in enforcing with the aid of its police their ban against the Ati Sudras who had tried to defy it.

## ARYAVARTA AND 'BOERLAND'

It may interest you to learn that the latter of the two 'mentors of the masses' referred to before in connection with the Sambuka episode (p 37), has defended the execution of the Sudra ascetic in words to this effect 'Rama did right in making an example of Sambuka, for if all Sudras forsook their legitimate occupations and took to religious exercises like the misguided Sambuka, how were the Twice born castes to be maintained?' But it is almost needless to say that the same argument would apply to the *yogis* and *tapasvis* of the Twice-born castes also 'If all the Twice-born people took to *tapasya* and

<sup>1</sup> Though Rationalism is neither Western nor modern alone but universal and of high antiquity yet it has had its greatest development in the West and in modern times.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote on p 13 above



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Hindus) of the S African Caste system Here the Sudras and Ati Sudras are 'outside the pale of religious life' (*Dharma-bahya*), there no Black man may enter a public church for worship And General Smuts is their Manu For Smuts like Manu is a great 'idealist' who has based on racialism an entire philosophy of life As Manu and his like stigmatised all who questioned their socio-religious order as Heretics, and consigned them to complete ostracism in this life and to hell in the next,<sup>1</sup> so Smuts and his confreres give the pro-Native dog the name of 'Bolshevik' and hang or imprison him forthwith As Manu described all the country south of the Vindhya, beyond Aryavarta, as an unholy region of barbarians,<sup>2</sup> so the gospeller of the Colour bar in S Africa refers to all the territory towards the north beyond 'the zone of White civilization', with similar disdain, as the Black Beyond The parallel between Aryavarta and 'Boerland' would be complete but for the fact in S Africa they have not yet assigned to their womankind the position of inferiors and dependents, as Manu and his ilk loftily did Otherwise, who dare say that in the following ordinances of Manu we have not an almost exact replica of the S African segregation system, even to the rule requiring the Natives to wear identification badges?

'Near public trees by the road side, in places for burning the dead, on mountains, and in groves, let those tribes [enumerated before] dwell, plying their several trades and commonly known by them

'The abode of a Chandala and a Svapaka must be without the town they must be denied the use of entire vessels<sup>3</sup> their wealth must be dogs and asses (alone)

'Their clothes must be the mantles of the deceased their dishes broken pots, their ornaments rusty iron, and continually must they roam from place to place

<sup>1</sup> See Manu II 11 also IV 30 IV 163 V 90 and IX 225

<sup>2</sup> II 23

<sup>3</sup> Or according to another interpretation their vessels must be treated as untouchable



'Let no man who observes the sacred Law hold any intercourse with them, let their dealings be confined to themselves, and their marriages only between their equals

'Let what food they get from others be given them in a broken pot,' and let them not walk by night in cities or towns

'By day they may walk about for the purpose of work, distinguished by the king's badges, and they shall carry out the corpse of every one who dies without kindred Such is the fixed rule' (A 50-55)

## A NOMINAL, UNTRADITIONAL VARNASRAMA

I know, Mahatmaji, your version of *Varnasrama* is quite different from the popular or the traditional idea of it. Of the *varnas* you will have four and no more, and moreover you will not have them as 'watertight compartments,' for you will allow 'inter dining' and also inter marriage among them, both *anuloma* and *pratiloma*. The only thing you will retain of *varna* is that you will require that all Hindus, both men and women should depend for their livelihood upon those occupations which are 'hereditary' in that particular occupational group within the *varna* to which their family belongs this on the ground that the hereditary transmission of mental as well as physical traits is nothing less than a law of Nature. As for the *asramas* (the religious orders or stages of life), you will make no distinction between the *Dvijas* and the *Sudras*, or between men and women that is to say, in spite of the fact that the *asramas* have hitherto been the privileges of the *Dviya* males, though with distinctions among themselves as to age etc according as they are *Brahmans*, *Kshatriyas* or *Vaisyas*,—you will allow men and women of all *varnas* to go through all the *asramas* on the same terms. In no case will you ban on the ground

<sup>1</sup> Or according to another interpretation let food be given them in a broken pot (not by the householder's own hand) but through another (as a servant)

of caste or sex the acquisition of any knowledge or the engaging in any lawful occupation, *except for livelihood*, the occupation for which must be confined to one's 'hereditary' line, as defined above. In fine, while you profess to retain both *varnas* and *asramas* you in fact take away almost all of their characteristics, and in so doing you may be said to do away with almost all of them but their names.

Only that 'hereditary' condition raises some points which have got to be cleared.

While on the one hand you are for the institution of the four *varnas*, with no inter *varna* barriers to social intercourse (even to marriage), and with the *asramas* open to all on the same terms,—thus going against the traditional Varnasrama law in letter and spirit,—you are on the other hand restricting one's occupation for livelihood (one's 'profession', for short) to the hereditary occupation of one's family, instead of allowing it to be any or all of the different occupations allowed by the ancient Law givers to each *varna*. With no barriers and no distinction among the *varnas*, and only the occupational group mattering for purposes of one's profession, in your scheme,—where is the propriety in saying that the *varnas* shall be only four, rather than that the *varnas* (or whatever they may be called) shall be as many as there are distinct hereditary occupations reckoned in the whole community? By restricting one's profession to the hereditary occupation of one's family, you are indeed going in for as many groups or 'castes' as there are *distinct occupations* (or what are reckoned as such) in the whole community. Once Hindu society is re-organised on the basis of such a scheme, some agency will have to be instituted with a view to regulating the relative strength of all the groups, since the prolificness of each group cannot be expected to accord naturally with the law of demand and supply at each succeeding generation of that society. That is a corollary of the scheme, which, I think, must considerably complicate your apparently simplified Varnasrama. Next, as you allow marriage between members of different occupational groups whether within or without the same

arna, and since hereditary traits are derived from the female as well as the male parent, you might have specified whether the 'hereditary' of your scheme meant hereditary in the male or the female line, or whether it was to be one or the other according to the sex of the progeny of the inter marriage. In the absence of such specifying, we may take it that you mean *hereditary in the male line*, in which case your physical justification of the 'hereditary' rule would become the weaker for an arbitrary restriction like that. If, on the other hand, by 'hereditary' is meant hereditary in either the male or the female line according as the individual concerned is a son or a daughter of an inter group marriage, then again the attempted justification of the 'hereditary' restriction on biological grounds would lose what validity might be claimed for it but for the allowing of inter marriage, for it is well known that the sex of the offspring is no indicator of the preponderance of the traits inherited from one or the other of the parents *e g.*, a dark, tall and stout father and a fair, short and thin mother may have (1) a dark short and stout daughter, (2) a fair, tall and stout son, (3) a fair thin daughter of medium height, (4) a darkish stout son of middling height, and so on, with all sorts of variations. So much for the material side of Heredity.

## IS HEREDITY DEPENDABLE?

Now, on the moral side, let us see if Heredity is the invariably dependable thing that would justify such a scheme as you propose. If Heredity were all, we should not have an intrepid general like Hemu springing from the 'non martial' Vaisyas and making a bold bid to recover Hindu rule over Hindustan, at a time when most of Hindustan's 'hereditary' warriors were lying low like reeds before the Muslim blast,—or a Joan of Arc heroically resolved to deliver her country from the oppression of its conquerors in the face of the supineness of its 'hereditary' warriors, and succeeding in her self imposed task in spite of the treachery of some of them,—or a Lakshmibai of Jhansi fighting at the head of her few troops in defence of her small patrimony against an encircling force of voracious aliens, at the same time that

a Nizam, descendent of the mighty Moghals, was willingly getting his golden chains tightened round his neck and arms,—or a community like the Sikhs forged out of heterogeneous castes given to petty trade or agriculture and looked down upon as Sudras transformed by the training of their Gurus and tribulation from their enemies into the vanguard of Hindustan and the bulwark of her liberties against her hereditary invaders, when her 'hereditary' defenders had proved an ignominious failure for the purpose

It may be objected that such instances as the above, of 'women, Vaisyas, and Sudras' figuring as generals or warriors are extremely rare,—that in fact they are such exceptions as only go to prove the rule, as they say True, but why prevent or discourage by means of rigid sacrosanct laws such exceptions, whenever and wherever they crop up, from fructifying and giving of their best to the society to which they belong? True, not all 'women Vaisyas and Sudras may prove efficient soldiers, but if any of them happen to be martially minded, why deny them the opportunity of serving the nation as soldiers, on the ground that it is not their 'hereditary business'? *The fact is that Heredity is not all. Both history and biology prove that Environment (which includes training) does play a by no means negligible part in determining individual bent and aptitudes*

If Heredity were all we should not find farmers begetting soldiers, nor soldiers begetting scientists, nor scientists begetting novelists and nonentities. But numberless are the instances we have of such, down the ages of recorded history. And many of these instances have arisen not only in apparent violation of Heredity, but in spite also of training attempted in the 'hereditary' line. In India itself, in ancient times, it was the ruling Kshatriyas who originated *Brahma vidya* or the doctrine of the Universal Soul and not the priestly Brahmins who might be expected to have done so, it being a matter within their special province—the spiritual. You once said that it was the Brahmins' unique service to the world to have discovered that *vidya*. That, however, is not the case

To the Brahmans may go the credit of having handed down the *vidya* to posterity. It was the Kshatriyas who originated it, while the priests were busy multiplying rituals and literally deifying the *Dakshina* or Fee to be paid to them for conducting their own elaborate mummeries at the courts of pious, rich princes.

## THE HEREDITARY RESTRICTION—ITS WASTE AND HARM.

If a sweeper's son has great mathematical talent and can serve society as a professor of mathematics, will it be wise for society to force him to earn his livelihood as an indifferent sweeper of filth rather than as a good professor of mathematics? And if a mathematics professor's son happens to be no good at figures or (for that matter) anything else in the scholastic line, but bids fair to do extremely well as a sweeper, will it be right for society not to let him take up a sweeper's job for his livelihood? Fancy, we say to the sweeper's son (the would be professor of mathematics) 'As you are a sweeper's son, for your living you must only sweep, or at the worst you may teach the art of sweeping to fellow sweepers. You may cultivate mathematics as a hobby, and teach it to others as a recreation, as a "sacrificial" activity or the like, but never as a means of livelihood.' And fancy, we say to the mathematics professor's son (the would be sweeper) 'As you are a mathematics professor's son, for your living you must only teach mathematics or at least something in the scholastic line. You may cultivate scavenging as a hobby or lend a hand when there is a sweepers' strike on, but never, never must you take to sweeping for your living.' In the one case good talent will be lost to us for want of suitable encouragement, unless his 'hobby' is 'bounty fed', and in the other case we shall be harbouring a parasite, a drone, a 'white elephant'. Therein lies the waste and the harm of every hereditary system—and most markedly of one that holds sway with the sanction of religion.

"In the same family brothers and sisters often differ markedly in physical strength and appearance, intelli-

gence and intellectual achievement, education, character etc., and follow different professions" So said Babu Ramanand Chatterjee the veteran publicist, presiding over the Jat Pat Todak Conference at Lahore in the Christmas of 1929. That remark of his to my mind, is an apt and conclusive answer to those who would maintain Caste as an institution justified by 'Nature's way',—on the plea that 'children inherit both body and mind from their parents'. If that were anything like a dependable rule, we should not find such vast divergences among the progeny of the same parents, as we frequently do. The fact is that occupational groups in a community are not like species in a genus, but they are like close varieties, which are liable to degeneration if isolated from each other.

## ISOLATION AND STAGNATION

It was on the occasion already mentioned that Ramanand Babu observed

'Owing to the absence of hereditary caste in Western countries, some of their greatest intellects have devoted themselves to the manufacturing industries and commerce and surpassed our industrial and commercial classes. Our Kshatriya warriors of old were matchless for bravery. Yet they could not prevent India from being conquered, because all the people of the country were not interested in defending it, and because strategy and methods of warfare remained unimproved, owing to men of superior intellect from outside the caste not having concerned themselves with their improvement.'

The effect of such isolation due to hereditary caste is well brought out by R. C. Dutt in his work already cited. After drawing an illuminating parallel between Europe in the Middle Ages with its Feudal System and India at the corresponding period with its Caste-system the historian proceeds

'But here the parallel ends. The sturdy feudal barons of Europe soon mixed with the people, fought

the people's battles in the field, the council board or the countinghouse, and thus infused a new and vigorous life in modern nations. In India the caste system prevented such a fusion, and the Rajput Kshatriyas, isolated from the people, soon fell a prey to foreign invaders, and were involved in a common ruin.

"Darker days then followed on the loss of independence. Kshatriyas and Vaisyas were equally prostrated. The bold myth was then proclaimed that all who were not Brahmans were Sudras, that none but Brahmans were entitled to religious knowledge, or could perform sacred rites or wear the sacred thread. A grosser superstition and a deeper degeneracy followed in the wake of monopoly in knowledge,—that knowledge which was the common right of all Aryans for three thousand years,—that knowledge without which a nation is dead.

"Terrible is the penalty which the Hindus have paid for their national ignorance and caste disunion: their social degeneracy and political weakness. For six centuries after 1200 A.D. the history of the Hindus is a blank.<sup>1</sup> They were the only civilized Aryan nation on the earth over three thousand years ago; they are the only people socially lifeless and politically prostrate today, not only among Aryans, but among all the civilized nations of the earth.<sup>1,2</sup>

Earlier in the work, Dutt had pointed out that "there was a time in Europe when institutions somewhat similar

<sup>1</sup> If the rise of the Marathas in the seventeenth century was taken into account as it might have been, then the period would be five centuries nearly instead of six. But as regards cultural progress with which Dutt was primarily concerned his statement holds. (The rise of the Vijayanagara kingdom in the 14th century and that of the Sikhs in the 18th may be treated as only local rallyings.)

<sup>2</sup> Vol. III edition of 1890 near the end.—In the later edition of the work called *The People's Edition for circulation in India only* of 1899 the year in which its author presided over the National Congress at Lucknow this passage like most of the others I have herein excerpted will be found to be much curtailed.

to the caste-system of India sprang from the same causes which operated in India, viz, the feebleness and enervation of the people, and the pride and power of warriors and priests," and shown how "the clergy, the knighthood and the people of Europe in the Middle Ages answered in some respects to the Brahmans, the Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas of India "

"But the resemblance is in appearance only. The clergy of Feudal Europe did not marry, and its ranks were recruited from the ablest, the cleverest, the most learned among the people. The knights too were glad to welcome into their ranks doughty squires and brave warriors among the people. The people too in the darkest days of feudal oppression had more of tough life and rude vigour than the passive and submissive citizens of the Gangetic plain. The people in Europe soon formed leagues to protect their commerce, fortified their towns to meet the marauding barons, formed municipal corporations, and trained themselves to arms to defend their interests in those insecure times. Ambitious scions of baronial houses often mixed with the people, and fought their battles in the field and in the council board, and this healthy admixture, which the caste system prevented in India, revived and strengthened the people in Europe. Feudalism and the absolute power of the clergy decayed as trade and commerce and political life rose among the people, and the danger of the people being divided into three 'castes', if it ever existed in Europe, passed away once and for ever " <sup>1</sup>

## IS VARNASRAMA REVIVABLE ?

Can society be re-organised on a *varnasrama* basis in this land, now or at any future time? On that question also Babu Ramanand Chatterjee had, on the occasion already mentioned, some observations to make, to which I venture to draw your attention. But before I do so, I may be permitted to remark that what is inherently wrong

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I pp 233-4



in *varnasrama* is *varna*, and not *asrama* and that the *asrama* scheme may be all right by itself—with the *varna* discriminations removed. I say this because it happens that the loudest upholders of *varnasrama* today are the least regardful of the *asramas*, even in their own persons. They seem to care only for the *varna* privileges and dislike the *asrama* restraints. They evade *sannyasa*, for instance, on the convenient plea of its being 'forbidden for the Kali age', and as for the first *asrama*, viz religious studentship for at least 12 years, except for the farce that is gone through in its name in a couple of days, it is given up altogether in favour of its secular and more lucrative counterpart,—and this perhaps on the plea of there being British rule now added to Kali yuga. (Why should they not regard British rule as being, if not *Rama rajya*, Rama's Monkeys' raj<sup>1</sup> and so revert to the old *asramas* in all their original purity or impurity? I wonder) Those who have taken to the fourth *asrama* of *sannyasa* have done so by skipping over all or most of the previous *asramas*, the name of the third called *vanaprastha* being apparently never heard of by them, and so *sannyasa* has come to be for our social bankrupts a ready means of becoming irresponsible parasites on society, and honoured ones at that. In this facility, it seems, lay the weakness of the Buddhist system—a weakness which proved fatal to it in the land of its birth, because while it abolished (or rather ignored) *varna*, and did so rightly, it laid undue emphasis on only one of the four *asramas*, viz *sannyasa* or monkery, to the neglect or debasement of the rest, whereas the orthodox system (in its early days at any rate) gave the greatest importance to *grihasthasrama* or the householder's stage calling it the best and the highest of the *asramas* (*śyeshthasrama* and *śreshthasrama*) since all the rest depended upon it. (See, e.g., *Vasishtha*, VIII 15 and *Manu*, VI 89, 90) But what can be more ridiculous today than to find as an upholder of *varnasrama* an old widower who comes of a priestly family, but has spent his life in the service of the *Mlechchha* raj,—who, while his

<sup>1</sup> See footnote on p 13 above

daughter, a virgin 'widow,' is living under his roof and he pretends to be horrified at the idea of her marrying 'again', himself marries a girl younger even than his daughter,—and who, while continuing to live the life of a householder in the enjoyment of all the pleasures that his pension can buy or his old age allow, is loud in opposing an Act meant to prevent child 'marriage' and thereby also to preclude child 'widowhood'—all in the name of *varnasrama*? Yet several such individuals are reported to have graced the Varnasrama Dharma Conference at Jalgaon!

But to come back to the question of *varnasrama* revival here is what Ramanand Babu said on it

'*Varanasrama*, if revived, is to be arranged according to *guna* (quality) and *karma* (work or occupation) Is there any authority possessed of sufficient knowledge of the *gunas* and *varnas* of all persons of all ages and both sexes in Hindu India, and having adequate sense of justice and sufficient impartiality and power to enforce obedience who can divide these persons into four groups? In these days of equality, liberty, and fraternity, would not there be numerous rebels against his decisions? And remember, this work of fourfold division cannot be done once for all Sons and daughters do not all possess the *gunas* of their parents or follow the professions of their parents Therefore, at each succeeding generation, there must be a fresh fourfold division Nay, even that is an understatement A man may change his occupation once or more than once in his life a man of Brahman parentage may be a cook a priest and a petty trader at the same time, husband and wife may not follow the same profession and may have different *gunas*, and a man may have different *gunas* at different periods of life What authoritative person or persons can have the power to constantly re arrange the groups repeatedly, providing satisfactorily for all these complications?

Besides there are many modern occupations which it would be difficult to assign to a particular one of the recognised four *varnas*, e.g., it would be an extremely

ticklish matter to determine whether a stenographer typist was a 'Brahman' or a 'Vaisya' or a 'Sudra,' and similarly whether a professor in a military college was a 'Brahman' or a 'Kshatriya' And then, what about the non-Hindu communities in the land, which do not recognise any *varnasrama*? Surely, *varnasrama* and non-*varnasrama* societies cannot exist side by side without vitiating each other like oil and water thrown together

Coming to some alleged good points of the existing system, Babuji said

"Some praise has been bestowed on the system of Caste for its providing every one born in a caste with some occupation, for preventing unlimited competition and ambition, for instituting a sort of democracy within the caste, for making it possible to acquire great skill in crafts and trades owing to their hereditary character, and so on To some extent this praise is deserved,—though there is no such hereditary physical transmission of acquired tastes, inclinations character and skill as is generally and popularly believed But we have to remember that in spite of caste there is greater unemployment and enforced idleness in India than in any other civilised country, and that there are also great competition and ambition The social democracy within each caste is at present more nominal than real a highly educated rich man of any caste certainly does not look upon and treat an illiterate and poor fellow casteman as his social equal It is true that many of our hereditary craftsmen possess great skill but not all Moreover owing to there not being infusion of fresh blood, fresh intelligence and fresh ideas into a craftguild and its methods, and owing to comparative absence of competition many of our craftsmen have been less skilled and more characterless than the craftsmen of other countries which have no caste Take an example In Calcutta Chinese carpenters command much higher wages than Indian carpenters because of their greater skill greater reliability and greater industry Again among Indian

carpenters, Musalmans are to be found in greater numbers than Hindus

...

...

...

"Caste discriminates in favour of some persons and against others quite unreasonably and unjustly. In the same family brothers and sisters often differ markedly in physical strength and appearance, intelligence and intellectual achievement, education, character, etc., and follow different professions. Yet those who are superior in those things do not despise and cut off social intercourse with those who are inferior, nor are any treated as untouchable. Men and women of the same caste differ in the same way and sometimes more, yet there is social intercourse, inter-dining and intermarriages among them. But persons of inferior caste are sometimes superior in strength, intellect, character, etc. to those of higher caste, and yet they are despised.

...

..

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"Hereditary caste is a thoroughly unreasonable institution. Division into occupational groups may and do exist, as they do everywhere, but there is no reason why they should be made hereditary and the groups placed in water tight compartments."

Equally illuminating and pointed are the following observations Bahuji made on the same occasion

"We generally feel encouraged by the achievements and example of Japan, which is an oriental country. But we forget that the Samurai, the Japanese highest caste, who were warriors, voluntarily gave up their privileges, that caste was destroyed in Japan and that the Eta, who were the Japanese untouchable class, were declared by law eligible for all professional offices and educational facilities, and were entitled to be treated as the equals of people of other classes. Have we got the same social patriotism, the same sense of justice, and the same desire and power of giving up our privileges for the sake of the country?"

\* From time immemorial many foreign peoples have entered India and been absorbed by the Hindus. Many foreigners have become Brahmans, Kshatriyas, etc. It is popularly believed that at least the higher castes are Aryans. But the fact is, there is no pure race in anthropology, there is no Aryan race proper. In many provinces of India, Bengal and Madras, for example, the Brahmans are markedly mixed people. There are sometimes even in the same family persons of very fair and very dark complexions and with strikingly different features. We Bengalis are more Dravidian and Mongolian by race than Aryan, and we are not at all ashamed of the fact. The superior qualities of manhood are not a monopoly of Aryans.

"Some of the evil results of Caste have been already incidentally referred to. It has done great spiritual harm to men. Some castes have been puffed up with a sense of their importance. They have become spiritually proud and imagined that they were born pure and holy and others were impure and even untouchable. The priestly class have felt that they could give salvation to others. Unhappily though they thought or pretended to think that they could save others, themselves they could not save, nor could they save their country from being trodden under the heels of conqueror after conqueror.

\* Caste has prevented or in any case sought to prevent, the direct access of others than the priests to God. It has set up not one mediator as in other religions, but a whole class of mediators.

Those who under the influence of Caste considered themselves to belong to an inferior class of men have become unduly depressed. Their spirits and minds have not had full scope to develop. Thus the human race has been deprived of the intellectual, moral and spiritual wealth which they could otherwise have contributed to the common treasure house of humanity.

"The position of the Untouchables has become worse still, if possible. They have been treated as worse than the lower animals.

"Thus where modern India boasts of only about half a dozen men of international reputation, it could have boasted of scores of such if Caste had not prevented untold millions for ages from reaching the full stature of humanity.

"It has already been mentioned that India's loss of freedom has been due in great part to Caste. The lower orders have not cared much who, whether high caste Indians or conquering foreigners, became the top-dogs, because they felt that they were destined to remain the under dogs. In fact, as we see at present, it is easy to get the Non Brahman and Depressed Classes to declare that they would prefer foreign domination to the domination of the high-caste Hindus.

"Caste has led numerous Hindus to become converts to Christianity and Muhammadanism.

"It has been the cause of much jealousy and hatred between caste and caste.

"Caste has been perhaps the greatest obstacle to social, economical and political progress in India. It has stood in the way of the solidarity of the Hindu people, and prevented the growth of a compact nation. For where there is no mutual love and trust there cannot be that cement which binds the parts together."

The following remarks of his have a bearing on the much talked of but little accomplished Suddhi.

"I have already said that the contemptuous treatment of the lower castes has led large numbers of them to leave the fold of Hinduism. Thus there has been continual decrease of Hindus. Hindus can increase and could have increased their numbers by conversion from other religious communities. But these converts not being assured of an honourable place in the Hindu community, their number has been

small. Those who leave Hinduism for other faiths, or their descendents, cannot be reclaimed in large numbers for the same reason. In fact, so long as people cannot obtain the same social status which they have or can have among Christians and Moslems, they cannot think of becoming Hindus."

Here again it is Caste that hinders their becoming Hindus, as it was Caste that facilitated their becoming non-Hindus.

## HOW HINDUS SLIPPED INTO NON-HINDU FOLDS.

Most revivalists among us seem inclined to ascribe all the loss that Hindudom has suffered by defection from its ranks to non-Hindu folds down the centuries, mainly to the employment of unfair means like 'forcible conversion' by propagators of the alien faiths. But a perusal of the following rapid survey of our social history from before the rise of Buddhism to the modern epoch, taken from the pages of Dutt, will show where lay the weakness of Hindudom, and may also give our self-complacent revivalists a salutary shock. I again make no apology for reproducing these paragraphs here *in extenso*, except to say that those are all sadly omitted in the later "Popular" edition of the work.

"Hindu Aryans, when they first came to India, waged a long and destructive war of centuries against the aborigines before they could conquer Northern India and establish their religion throughout the land. That the early Hindus would cherish feelings of hostility and contempt against these fierce aborigines was only natural. But times changed, and the millions of aborigines at last submitted themselves to the Aryans<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The point of this paragraph would hold even if it was the case that the 'Hindu Aryans' were not all immigrants into India but were, as some archeologists hold, members of a race whose earliest traceable homeland was a belt of land which included the northernmost portions of this sub-continent. I must also remark that if it were just to describe the dispossessed aborigines as fierce, their conquerors could only be described as more 'fierce' and more cunning at the same time.

"They adopted the civilization of their conquerors, adopted their religion as far as they were allowed to do, engaged themselves in peaceful industry and trades, acquired riches and wealth, owned villages, and even in some instances acquired the religious knowledge of their masters (*Chhandogya Upanishad*, IV, 2)<sup>1</sup> The time had come when the Sudras might be formally admitted within the pale of Hinduism, and allowed to learn the Hindu Vedas, practice Hindu rites, and employ Hindu priests. Such a wise concession would have strengthened Hinduism for ever after, and saved it from manifold calamities and disasters. But this was not to be. The Aryan castes were exclusive, and they rigorously kept the Sudra out. They prohibited him from all religious knowledge and all religious rites, they made unjust and cruel civil and criminal laws against him, and they continued to treat him as an outcast and a slave long after he had acquired wealth and civilization and power. Such cruelty brought on its own retribution.

'Millions of intelligent, virtuous and influential Sudras sighed for a recognized status in the religious system of India.

'The time came, and the man. A son of a respected Kshatriya house descended from his status, and proclaimed that virtue—not caste—led to honour.

"Thousands at once came over and joined. Gautama Buddha, and Buddhism rapidly became a power in the land. Two centuries after Buddha the Maurya dynasty became the masters of Northern India. They were not Kshatriyas, and were therefore looked down upon by the adherents of caste. What wonder that the great Asoka made a clean sweep of caste, and adopted the

<sup>1</sup>The reference is to a story in the *Upanishad* wherein a Brahman named Brikva is induced to teach his religion to a rich Sudra named Janasruti Patrayana after he has been offered a thousand cows and a lot of other things and—on top of them all—the Sudra's own daughter for a wife. It was the last item as the teacher confesses which turns the scale of his reluctant mind in favour of giving lessons to his would be disciple and also father in law!



religion which honoured virtue and meritorious acts rather than caste?

"The same causes must have continued to operate during the thousand years after the time of Asoka. Those to whom Hinduism gave no status must have been glad to obtain a status in the more catholic religious system. Many a virtuous and intellectual and worthy member of society, whom Manu rigorously excluded from religious rites and observances, found religious consolation, and even learning, fame and distinction within the cloisters of vast monasteries. Indeed, the path to honour was made too easy and too wide, hundreds of thousands became Buddhist priests in order to live an easy and honoured and slothful life, and at last Buddhism tottered to its fall on account of its unwieldy body of idle monks and nuns.<sup>1</sup>

"Then followed a great political revolution. Ancient nations became enfeebled, ancient dynasties were swept away, and by the tenth century, the Rajputs had become masters of Northern India. Partly through innate lifelessness, and partly through persecution and violence, Buddhism was swept out of India, and the Hindus once more followed one common religion, the modern or Pauranic Hinduism.

"An opportunity now presented itself in the 8th to 10th century after Christ, (as it had come once before in the 8th to 10th century before Christ,) to deal with the Sudras in a catholic and kindly spirit, and to admit them to the same common religion and the same common observances. Other nations in the world,—among whom caste is unknown—have done so. The Greeks and their helot slaves have mingled and formed the modern Greek nation. The patricians of Rome

<sup>1</sup> As I have suggested before (p 77) this danger would have been obviated if while caste discriminations were abolished *sannyasa* had not been exalted as it was over the rest of the *asramas*. The later orthodox revivalists however who set up Caste did practically nothing to reduce the misplaced emphasis on *sannyasa*. The encouragement of a premature *sannyasa* inspired not by the ideal of social service but by sheer pessimism like that of the Sankarites is putting a premium on what is only an irresponsible self-centred mode of living.

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have mixed with the plebeians and with foreign tribes, and formed the modern Italian nation. The Normans have mixed with the Saxons in England, and the Franks have mixed with the Celts in France. Even the haughty barons of medieval Europe have mixed with their colonn and slaves, and formed the modern nations of Europe. Racial distinctions and political distinctions disappear one after another,—but caste distinctions, never.

\* The opportunity was lost. The Sudra castes were not admitted within the pale of respectable Hinduism. Once more they were cruelly debarred from the blessings of religious instruction and rites. Aryan priests would not officiate for them, and they had to appoint Brahmans of their own castes (the Varna Brahmans of modern India,) to perform for them religious rites and observances in imitation of the Hindu rites.

"More than this,—the Aryan Vaisya caste was now permanently disunited into profession castes—the Kayasthas, the Vaidyas, the goldsmiths, the potters, the weavers and others. They were disinherited of their ancient privilege of religious knowledge and the study of the Veda which now became the monopoly of Brahmans. And the Brahmans performed religious rites for these Aryan castes who had formerly the privilege of performing those rites themselves.

\* Thus there was a double injustice done,—an injustice to the sections of the ancient Vaisya caste who were disinherited of religious learning,—and an injustice to the Sudra castes who were still left outside the pale of the Hindu religion. The injustice once again brought its own retribution.

"Fifty millions of the population of India, formerly belonging to the untutored and uncared for Sudra castes, have fallen off from the precincts of Hinduism.

<sup>1</sup> That this last exclamation was meant only as a feeling hyperbole and not as a dictum to be taken literally is shown by the concluding portion of this excerpt.

and have embraced the faith of Islam India of to day is a house divided against itself

"The immediate successors of Mahomet were fired with a fervid enthusiasm to spread the faith of Islam, and to convert all Kafar nations to the religion of Mahomet The zeal lasted for a century, and within a century from the death of Mahomet, his religion had spread from Persia and Khorasan to Spain

"*Five centuries* after, this zeal scarcely survived, and when India was conquered in 1194, A D , the conquerors were more eager to extend their dominions, to increase their revenue, and to build their mosques and palaces, than to convert the Hindus Some acts of intolerance are recorded, but no organized attempt was made by the Musalman rulers of India to convert the population of India into the faith of Islam Wars were waged for the conquest of kingdoms and for the acquisition of wealth, but History records no wars and no systematic efforts to stamp out Hinduism

"The great centres of Musalman power—the districts of Delhi and Agra, the districts of Ahmednagar, Bhapur and Golconda, still teem with Hindu population Royal power was not exerted in an organized way to convert the Kafar millions, and Hindus remained Hindus

"Nevertheless, by a slow process, which history does not record,—but which is well known and universally recognised now,—there was a falling off from Hinduism there was an accession to the ranks of Islam Non Aryan Sudra castes, to whom Hinduism gave no status or position, fell off by the million, and secured a status and position for themselves by embracing the Mahomedan religion A little pressure was required to effect this end, and this little pressure was probably exerted by local Moulvies and Jagirdars Of all the provinces of Northern India Bengal contained the smallest proportion of Aryan population and the largest proportion of Non Aryan population And of the fifty millions of the Indian Musalmans the Bengal Musalmans number about twenty millions

"To one who has spent the best part of his life in observing the habits and ways of these low-caste Sudra Hindus, their rapid conversion is not a matter of surprise. Thirty-five centuries ago, the Punjab Aryans debarred the conquered Dasas from all religious observances; and twenty-five centuries ago, Vasishtha indignantly declared in his *Dharma Sutra* that the Brahman who would officiate as priest for a Sudra would be born again as a village pig! This feeling of contempt for the poor Sudra survives unfortunately to the present day. Aryan Brahmans in Bengal will not officiate as priests for the Sudra castes, will not accept their offerings or teach them religion; and Aryan castes like the Kayasthas and Vaidyas carefully avoid the Sudra castes, the pariahs of Hinduism. The Sudra castes hanker after an admission into the inner circle of Hinduism; they perform Hindu rites and ceremonials through Brahmans of their own, they are often more orthodox in their beliefs and practices than the higher castes; and practically they are Hindus in every sense of the word. But nevertheless, the crystal bar of Hinduism moves not; and the Sudra castes, eagerly pressing forward from all sides, are still debarred from the charmed circle by the adamant wall of caste! <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In a footnote at this point, the author after giving some instances says

'Non Aryan aboriginal tribes, as they rise in knowledge and civilization, adopt Hindu forms and practices, appoint Brahmans of their own and settle down as separate Hindu castes, outside the pale of the recognised Sudra castes. Hinduism thus assumes the form of a number of concentric circles! The light of purity and sanctity is supposed to shine brightest within the inner circle composed of the Brahmans and Aryan castes and to radiate less and less brightly to the second circle of Sudra castes, and the third circle of recently Hinduized aboriginal castes

"These remarks do not apply to Southern India where the Hindus (Brahmans and all) being of Dravidian stock, the distinction between Aryan castes and Non Aryan castes does not exist. But even there the sons of the ancient converts to Hinduism look down, I suppose on those who are now gradually drawing closer to Hinduism."

If Dutt's observation about the racial composition of S India Hindus be true, it is curious that the Brahman Non Brahmin cleavage should be the bitterest in S India.

"Later religions are free from this weakness which has crept into Hinduism. In the poorest and humblest of Buddhists, like Upali and Sunita,<sup>1</sup> the path was open by virtuous conduct and the acquisition of learning to honour, to distinction, and to priesthood. The poorest Christian peasant or labourer is the inheritor of all the beautiful moral precepts, all the rich consolations which that noble religion can afford to the highest princes and potentates of Europe. He is entitled to the ministrations of the highest priest in the land, and in the eye of religion, he is the equal of all other Christians. The humblest Mahomedan cultivator in the remotest corner of Bengal considers himself a member of a great confederation, he is proud of the traditions of Mahomet and of the Arab conquests and civilization, he listens to the teachings of distinguished Moulvies and Maulanas who visit Eastern Bengal from distant parts of India, he looks towards Mecca five times a day, and utters the same prayer which is prescribed for all Mussalmans, and if he can put by some money, he undertakes a visit to that holy place. His place is assured in the great Mahomedan community, and in the eye of religion, he is not inferior to the Sultan of Turkey or the Khedive of Egypt.

'The Hindu religious system gives no such assurance and no position of equality to the Sudra castes. High caste Brahmans will not preach to him nor perform rites for him. He may conform to Hindu rites and come closer to Hindu practices, but he and his sons for endless generations to come must be content to live in the precincts of Hinduism, looking reverently on the superior sanctity of the charmed circle and never hoping for admission therein for himself or his remotest descendent. The relations between him and the superior Hindu castes are slight, the cohesion of Hinduism is feeble here. He does what the Brahmans of his caste decide for him, and what the Panchayet of his community think to be right and proper. He remains close to Aryan Hinduism from a feeling of respect and veneration, but receives no encouragement and no

<sup>1</sup> Upali was a barber and Sunita a sweeper by origin.

assurance, and the Aryan castes will never receive him as one of their own, as an equal member of a great and common brotherhood. What wonder, when an appeal was made to him in a popular way to turn elsewhere for consolation and an assured status, that he should respond to that appeal? What wonder that twenty millions of the Sudra Hindus of Bengal, who were feebly attached to Aryan Hinduism by a feeling of admiration and imitation, and whom the Aryan Hindus did not recognize and did not minister to,—should have fallen off from the Hindu ranks and under some persuasion and probably under some pressure, secured for themselves a more assured status by embracing the Mahomedan faith? And if a similar appeal in a popular and intelligible manner be made again to the lower classes of Hindus in Bengal, there can be little doubt that those whom the caste system so unjustly and cruelly leaves in the shade will probably respond to the appeal again, and some more millions may yet fall off from Hinduism to which they are so feebly attached.

"It is natural for men to seek to improve their position, and the Sudras of India, to whom Hinduism in the past and in the present has been so cruel, have struggled hard to improve their status by accepting Buddhism or Vaishnavism or Islamism or anything else which has offered them a chance. All these religions have secured most of their converts from the Sudra castes of India. Hinduism with all its noble traditions, its rich moral lessons, and its ancient wealth of philosophy and deep thought, has continuously suffered in the past by its exclusive caste-system. In the future, a catholic and all-embracing love and a brotherly recognition of equality may reunite and save, an uncharitable exclusiveness will disunite and destroy."<sup>1</sup>

## BIGOTRIES—CREEDAL AND RACIAL

So far I have been dealing with the ravages wrought in the Hindu body politic by what may be termed "sanctified racialism", meaning by that term what lies at the back of the several cleavages of Touchable-Untouchable,

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., Vol. II, pp 301-314



Dvija Non Dvija, Brahman Non Brahman etc that we Hindus have been 'religiously' cherishing. Now it is the fashion in some quarters to compare these differences among us to antipathies like those between Catholics and Protestants, that once raged in Europe and still sometimes raise their head in the modern West (including America), and thus to make out that our own differences are nothing peculiar to us. But the fact is that the caste differences of Hindudom are not at all comparable to the creedal differences of other communities in their essential respects. The creedal bigotries of the Semitic religious world (i.e., both Christendom and Islam) may not be less fierce, they may be even more fierce, than our caste bigotries. But what we have to note is that the former are creedal, while the latter are racial, in their nature. In their origin, the antipathies of Caste may be compared, in so far as they are comparable to anything in the West, to the relations between the Normans and the English in early England, or the relations between the Whites and the Reds and the Blacks in America, or, best of all, to the operations of the Colour bar in S. Africa today. But, frankly racial as these differences are, creed (i.e., 'religion') can hardly be said to enter into them, and it is with *sanctified racialism* that we are here concerned. Of such racialism, it will be admitted, the institution of *varna* is the example, *par excellence*. The disabilities of Caste are such as follow one through life for the mere accident of one's birth. The persecutions of creed, being the outcome of 'theological odium', cease on the adoption by the persecuted of the creed of those in power. The Jew, for example, could escape his disabilities by forswearing his ancestral faith and embracing Christianity, the religion of the State, the Protestant 'heretic' could turn Catholic in a Catholic State, or the Hindu *kafir* turn Musalman in a Moslem State, and escape persecution. But with us one born an Unapproachable must die an Unapproachable!

<sup>1</sup> Of course a sort of escape was afforded by the adoption of Mahomedanism or Christianity after the advent of these faiths in the land. The bitter anti-Hindu fanaticism of non-Hindu communities like the Moplas recruited mostly from the persecuted sections of Hindudom is thus easily explained. Hatred of high-caste Hindus may be said to run in their veins.

That is the speciality of Caste. It exerts a continuous corrosive influence on its victims, while creedal bigotry will at the worst burn them up. As to the relative gravity of the life-long suffering and humiliation borne by an Unapproachable—supposing the circumstances of his birth and life have left humanity enough in him for the humiliation to be felt as vividly as one might imagine—or the scarcely less tribulations of a high-caste girl who has the misfortune to be widowed and has not 'followed her husband' by committing *Sati*, on the one hand, and the quickly ending tortures of a heretic stoned to death or a witch burnt at the stake, on the other, I can only recall the words of one of the wisest and best of living Hindus. It was in the year 1925, when many Hindu leaders were pointing the finger of scorn to orthodox Islam in consequence of the stoning to death of Ahmediyya 'heretics' by judicial process in Afghanistan, while at the same time vast masses of our co-religionists were struggling against the curse of Unapproachability cast on them for the crime only of their birth, and at a place called Vaikam, in particular, in the Hindu ruled State of Travancore, large numbers of them were going through the fire of a long-drawn passive-resistance campaign to vindicate their right to the use of a public road which all other men could use, and the very beasts also but not they, lest a Hindu temple standing within a certain distance of the road be 'polluted' by their approach,—it was in these circumstances that the editor of the *Indian Social Reformer* wrote: 'Stoning to death is not the only form of inhumanity. There are numerous others which are not so palpably revolting, but which are nevertheless equally, if not more, devastating in their effects on their victims. It is with reference to such that the Poet exclaims

'Is there no stoning save by flint and rock,  
No desolation but by sword and fire?'<sup>1</sup>

It should not be supposed, however, that because sanctified racialism is our speciality, we have no parallel to the creedal hatred of the Semitic-religious world, to answer

<sup>1</sup>The I S R. of 23-3-25

for. Only, it would seem, creedal hatred with us rarely took the form of fanatic ferocity, as it did and still does with the Semitic religionists. With us apparently it was a matter of cursing rather than killing. Yet the persecutions of the Buddhists and other protestant sects in ancient India by the orthodox following the lead of 'learned' zealots like Kumarila are well known to students of history. Manu himself classes 'heretics' (interpreted to mean Buddhists) with gamblers and liquor sellers, and requires their instant banishment from the towns in which they live (IX 22.) That the odium theologicum was not absent from among the rival orthodox sects themselves, the following verses from the *Vṛiddha-Harṣa saṃhita* are witness

रुद्रार्चने त्रिपुंड्रस्य धारणे यत्र दृश्यते ।  
 तच्छूद्राणां विधिः प्रोक्तो न द्विजानां कदाचन ॥७३॥  
 शिवार्चने त्रिपुंड्रं च शूद्राणां तु विधीयते ।  
 तद्विधानमिदं ये च विप्रा शिखरायणाः ॥  
 ते चैव देवलोका ह्येयाः सर्वकर्मबहिष्कृताः ॥९३॥  
 वैष्णवः पुरयो यस्तु शिवब्रह्मादिदेवतान् ।  
 प्रणमेताचयेद्वापि विष्टया जायते कृमिः ॥१४२५॥

In these verses the Siva worshipping Brahmans are denounced as being as bad as Sudras (evidently a term of abuse), unfit to be associated with, and we are told that if a Vaishnava venerates in any way gods like Siva and Brahma he is born again as a worm in dung. Such is the piety of the (evidently Vaishnava) author of a reputed Smṛiti !

## SANCTIFIED HIMSA

If there is anything for which Hindu religious tradition may claim credit above all other religious traditions, it is the doctrine of universal *ahimsa*—thanks in the main to protestant movements like Buddhism and Vaishnavism. But even that noble doctrine has been debased by a callous priesthood, so that, in spite of our boasted *ahimsa* and,

indeed, our innate reverence for all forms of life, we must confess we are responsible for some of the worst *ahimsa* perpetrated in the world. I am not referring to the ordinary difference between our practice and our profession of the *ahimsa* ideal,—a difference that may be said to be inevitable in regard to this as in regard to other ideals. I am not referring, in fact, to the *ahimsa* for which our weak flesh, rather than our willing spirit, may be held daily responsible. I have in mind nothing less than the *ahimsa* that is done *in the name of religion* or *for the sake of religious merit*, not by the ignorant vulgar, but by the learned priestly custodians of our religion.

First in this category of sanctified *ahimsa* I would mention the custom of burning widows alive with their husbands' dead bodies,—a practice apparently suicidal but almost wholly due to the exercise of heavy social pressure, not shrinking even from physical force on occasion, upon its victims. It is now about a hundred years since *Sati* was made illegal in the whole of British India. This was rendered possible through the exertions chiefly of Ram Mohan Ray,—him whom you once called a 'pigmy' in comparison with some other religious personalities of Hindudom, while assessing the worth of Western education.<sup>1</sup> But the cruel custom still lingers under priestly influence, and you know, cases of it occur in the country now and then to shock humanity's conscience.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The comparison was I believe between the medieval mystics Nanak and Chaitanya on the one hand and Ram Mohan Ray on the other. Odious as comparisons are said to be that one was peculiarly unhappy where he who is styled the Father of Modern India was concerned.

<sup>2</sup> The custom of female infanticide which like *Sati* was once so widespread in the country especially in Northern India though equally a violation of *ahimsa* cannot I believe be brought under sanctified *ahimsa*. There is to my knowledge no sacred text directly or table in its defence. If however infanticide of any sort was practised by way of sacrifice to the deities it could be adduced as an instance of sanctified *ahimsa*. As for human sacrifice in general, cases of it occasionally come before the courts from backward tracts in the country farthest from the influence of the Satanic West and it is said to linger yet among certain priestly castes addicted to Saktism in Southern India,—

Then, with regard to the lower animals, the custom of sacrificing them to the deities is another instance of our sanctified *himsa*. Every thinking person will allow that what would otherwise be immoral must be deemed the more immoral when it is done in the name of religion, because its practice is then not only very difficult to eradicate, but apt to discredit the very name of religion. We call a lie that is uttered on oath a perjury, and treat it as more blameworthy or criminal than an ordinary lie. So, too, the slaughter of an innocent creature, carried out *in the name and with the forms of religion*, must be held to be more sinful than the same done in circumstances unconnected with religion. While such should be the standpoint of rational men, our priests look upon 'religious' slaughter as no *himsa*. And queer are the arguments by which it is sought to be defended. It is said to act as a check on man's natural tendency to destroy animal life for food, by discouraging the consumption of animal food outside the sacrificial rite. One might as well talk of the institution of deposition on oath as providing privileged occasions for telling lies, and as being a check therefore, on man's natural propensity to tell lies, by discouraging it outside the witness box! The excuse is also historically baseless, for animal sacrifices prevailed most when carnivorous habits were most in vogue even in the highest grades in Hindu society. Animal sacrifices therefore were not a check on carnivorous habits but rather a reflection of them. If, however, these bloody rites are claimed to be a concession to a natural weakness, then the concession is clearly a most irreligious one when secular slaughter is deemed sinful. Next the practice of animal sacrifice is said to induce a martial spirit into the sacrificer.

the sacrifice being said to be effected nowadays only by secretly dropping or poisoning the intended victim.

As to the nature of *Sati*, Alberuni's matter of fact observation though apparently naive shows true insight.

If a wife loses her husband by death she has only to choose between two things either to remain a widow as long as she lives or to burn herself and the latter eventually is considered the preferable because as a widow she is ill treated as long as she lives. (Dutt & Co. Vol. III pp 481-2)

cers, as if the valour exercised upon poor goats and buffaloes were powerful enough to transmute priestly cowardice into martial ardour, or, as if the 'ungodly' actions of the West which practise no bloody sacrifices were all deficient in martial qualities! And not only are Sastras quoted, in support of such 'religious' *himsa*, but, you may be shocked to learn, they have even been cited as enjoining that it should be done in the horribly revolting way in which animal sacrifices are performed by many Sakta priests in these parts "The limbs (of the goat) being securely tied up with hempen cords, its muzzle being stuffed with coir and tightly bound, and all other apertures in its body being similarly stopped up, the attending priests shall fist the victim to death, putting it in a gunny bag if necessary, so that neither sound, nor blood, nor ordure may come out of it while it is being offered up to the deities" Such is said to be the injunction of the Agamas or Tantras, which are the Sastras followed in these horrid rites. Could there be a worse degradation of religion? One is tempted to ask if this be religion, what is irreligion? and, If its professors be Priests of God, who then are Rakshasas? There is a fine saying, evidently of ancient 'heretic' origin, on the efficacy of bloody sacrifices, to be read in the Sanskrit story book *Panchatantra*, to this effect

"Trees cut down, and beasts slaughtered,  
And blood spilt about in dirty pools,  
—If these take one to Heaven,  
What takes one to Hell, I pray?"<sup>1</sup>

Our orthodox pandits might answer 'It is such heretical questioning that takes you to Hell'<sup>1</sup> That would only be a measure of their slave mentality, showing how deeply enslaved their Reason and Conscience have been by Tradition and Authority. But it is such a comforting thought to remember that in every age and clime there

<sup>1</sup> वृक्षाञ्छित्या पशून् हत्वा कृत्वा रुधिरकर्मणः ।

यद्येवं गम्यते स्वर्गे नरके केन गम्यते ॥ (Tantra III.)

have been choice spirits who have done their bit to help liberate our shackled Natural Guides and let them come into their own. The Mahomedan Kabir was one such. At the sight of a goat being sacrificed, he is said to have exclaimed "Oh, this is the punishment to one who eats only grass! What then will be the punishment to him who eats the flesh of this poor goat?" But to such a question, I fancy, orthodox apologists will have their answer ready. To the scruples of Conscience they will oppose the authority of Scripture and assure you on the authority of Manu, for instance, that the sacrificer "conveys both himself and his victim to the highest place" in Heaven (V 42). Never mind if for the victim the attainment of the promised place in Heaven means experiencing a veritable Hell on earth,—that is to say, if the Tantric Sastras as quoted above are worth anything.

The ordaining of silken raiment as particularly holy for ritual purposes is another instance, among several others that could be mentioned, showing what our sanctified *ahimsa* requires or our irrational *ahimsa* allows. Silk is a substance that is mostly obtained by the scalding alive of certain worms, and so what ought on rational grounds to have been regarded as distinctly unholy, with regard to the *ahimsa* principle, is treated as holy for ritual purposes, so that here again, as usual, we find priestcraft at variance with reason and humanity.

But all this I may say, is as nothing in comparison with our Caste and Sex incubus, which can glorify a King God as a Sudra lyncher and wife-deserter.

## CONCLUSION

I must now bring this enormous Letter to a close.

So then in the light of all the facts set out and considerations urged by me in this Letter, I would humbly request you to give your views on the several issues raised and topics discussed in its course. On some of them, as the question of Sita's desertion by Rama, I know you have already expressed your opinion. But as judges revise their own previous rulings in the light of new facts and arguments brought to their notice there will be nothing amiss

in your doing a like thing in this case. No doubt, you who are one of the most eminent of the world's Satyagrahis are almost the last person to need to have that consideration urged. But in urging it I am only excusing what may appear to some readers as my presumption in asking you to re-form your judgment about Rama rajya, and particularly about that Sita affair.

We are told, when the gods were troubled by the demons, they often went to their lord Vishnu for succour. When the demonic activities of bodies like the Varna srama Sangh and the Bharata Dharma Mahamandal, south and north of the Vindhyas, are seeking to perpetuate among the Hindu masses their home-bred "slave mentality" and at the same time execrating the Congress engaged in the fight with the foreign 'slave holders', it is natural that your co-religionists filled with misgivings for the future of their community should turn to you for lead in the fight against such suicidal forces within the community. And I am sure, in addressing this Letter to you I am voicing the feelings of most of your co-religionists who have bestowed any thought on those forces and the tremendous "slave-mentality" behind them. Against that 'slave mentality', we hope, you will raise your powerful voice as effectively as you have raised it against that other "slave-mentality"—the political counter part, and indeed the natural issue, of the home variety. In fact, I am speaking for those who like Babu Bhagvan Das believe that the gains of the nation's fight under your leadership against the forces of darkness in the political sphere can only be consolidated by a successful fight against the forces of darkness in the socio-religious sphere. You have doubtless done wonders in this direction already. But a fiercer and more sustained fight needs to be fought against these forces of darkness than you could afford to engage in so far. And we hope, you will be minded and enabled to do it soon. In that hope, and with reverential love,

I remain, dear Mahatmaj,

Yours most sincerely,

S D NADKARNI

Karwar,

May 1931



## APPENDIX I

### “RAMA-RAJYA”

The following is an illuminating article by Mr. D. S. Deshpande, which appeared, among other papers, in the monthly REASON of Bombay, in its issue for May 1935

—R. D K.

I would recommend to all who speak and write in pious praise of the Ramayan and like works to read an absorbing little book entitled ‘On RAMA-RAJYA Etc’ by S D Nadkarni (published by the Samaj Samata Saogh of Dadar, Bombay)

I had seen this book reviewed in the papers several months ago, and though I had wished to order a copy I forgot about it. It was in a shop in the Congress Exhibition grounds at Worli (in Bombay) that I saw its copies and bought one. As it happened that I finished reading the book at about the same time that I read Mahatma Gandhi's latest statements on what he calls the true Varna shram and the position of women in it in the *Harijan* of Sept 28 and Oct 12, I ordered a copy of the book to be sent to Mahatmaj, and am awaiting his views on it

The book is, as its author calls it, “an Expostulatory Letter to the Greatest Hindu” (meaning Mahatmaj) “from a Critical co-religionist” (that is, the writer of it). It is in reality a reply to a set of apparently influential people like the Shankaracharyas etc. who met in a Conference some years ago, and declared for “Swaraj as we had it in the days of Ramchandra” and also for certain other things which showed quite clearly the nature of the Swaraj or ‘Ram-rajya’, which they wanted. But it is not equally clear why Sjt Nadkarni has chosen to address his ‘expostulation’ (or rather indictment) not to any of these estimable folk, the real defendants in the case, but to Gandhiji, unless it be that he regards him as a judge, and then, too, as one known to have betrayed an injudicial leaning towards the ‘Rama-rajists’ by certain of his

utterances, particularly one expressing approval of Rama's abandonment of his wife Sita

In the book are discussed with a critical detail and scholarly documentation, rare in these days of hurry and superficiality, what are called the three "blots on Rama's escutcheon", viz the assassination of Vali, the abandonment of Sita and the decapitation of Shambuk,—besides two other episodes, viz one from the Mahabharat about how Dronacharya caused Ekalavya to cut off his own right thumb to offer him as *dakshina* (preceptor's fee), and another from the Shrimad-Bhagavat relating to the Vaman Avatar. After subjecting these time-honoured stories ("skeletons in the cupboard of our heritage", as they are called in the book) to a close examination both ethical and literary, Mahatmaji's expostulator goes on to consider the broader questions of Varna, Ashram, women's position, Ahimsa, sectarianism etc. I am particularly interested in the first named subject. I find that some of the points brought up by Sjt Nadkarni on this head are answered explicitly or implicitly in Mahatmaji's latest statements on the subject, and it seems only fair to his expostulator as well as to him to say that the latter has conceded most of the former's points already. But the points raised on the question of Varna and Heredity on pages 69f of the book call for an answer, and I am anxious to know what Mahatmaji has to say on them.

I must confess, however, that I at first found it hard to accept many of the statements that Sjt Nadkarni makes in the book. But as there is an engaging ardour in the argumentative parts of the book, and a challenging sincerity is apparent through the whole of it, I marked some passages for verification, though I could not impugn off-hand the authenticity of any of them. I have been enabled by now to verify most of them to my satisfaction. I must say, however, that I have as yet hardly got over the disagreeable shocks I felt in reading certain portions of the book, in spite of its fascinating style. That is why I am as eager to know what Gandhiji has to say in

reply to this Expostulatory Letter to him, as I was to read its pages.

I do not claim to know the author of this "Ramarajya" But the occurrence of certain expressions in the book, such as "Rama's Monkeys' Raj" for British rule (pp 66 & 77), the description of Clive as "the forger and founder of the British Empire in India, who died by his own hand" (p 5), and the story about Miss Katherine Mayo being the Kaliyug Avatar of Sita (p 13), confirm me in my conjecture that it must be the gentleman of the same surname whom I met in a railway carriage between Bangalore and Belgaum in the Christmas week of 1927-28 I saw him engaged in a lively discussion conducted in Sanskrit with two Mysorean astrologers I was informed on enquiry that he had been a Shastri in a Pathshala somewhere on the Konkan coast<sup>1</sup> I even remember to have tried to make fun of the debaters in Sanskrit by asking them whether it was 'sanskrit' (i e, cultured or lawful) to talk in Sanskrit in a railway carriage in the presence of Mlenchhas, but the Mysoreans jokingly assured me that the old rules, if there were any against such conduct, did not bind them any longer, since their friend (Sjt Nadkarni) had made a new Smṛiti which abrogated all the old ones<sup>1</sup> I then asked if the Kaliyug had ended for a new Smṛiti to be made to supersede Parashara's (which is believed to be the Smṛiti for this Yug) The ex Shastri said that it was Gandhi-yug now, Kaliyug having ended with the coming of Miss Mayo and, on being asked how, he told me that quaint story retailed in the footnote to page 13 of this book

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact Mr Nadkarni served as a teacher of Sanskrit etc in the Government High School at Karwar his native town somewhere on the Konkan coast as it is referred to above and that was some time before the Non Co-operation Movement The conversation having been conducted in Sanskrit and the Sanskrit for a school being *patha sala* it is quite likely that the writer of the above article was misled into thinking that the author of RAMA RAJYA was a Shastri in a Path shala instead of a master in a High School

Be that as it may, I would fervently appeal to all Hindus who are not incapable of thinking for themselves, or who can keep their minds open to fresh light, not to fail to read this most stimulating book. No doubt, in spite of its engaging style, it may give rude shocks to the self-complacency of some. But seekers after Truth should persist and try to meet appeals made to Reason and Conscience by the same sort of arguments.

Readers of the book will find that the much boasted Bhagavad Gita is not left untouched in it. People who try to read Rationalism, Psycho-analysis and what not into the over-worked Gita,—as does Mr M V V K Ranga-chari for one,—will do well to meet, if they can, the shrewd comment and exhaustive arguments in the section on 'The Gita', in which certain unhealthy passages in the 'Lord's Song' are refreshingly dealt with.

The question of the ethical valuation of the Ramayan has just now some topical interest lent to it for Marathi readers by the fact that a controversy on the subject is going on in the columns of the *Dnyan mandir*, the newly started Marathi magazine in Bombay, following a contribution to its first number from Mr B V Jadhav, the ex-Minister, on 'The Lesson India has learnt from the Ramayan'. I am sure those of my readers who can follow Marathi will also benefit by this controversy.

D S DESHPANDE.

## A GLANCE AT THE FOREWORD OF Mr. B. G KHER'S

It reminds *one of nothing* so much as the reiteration by old Kaspar of his self-complacent remark on the carriage called 'The Battle of Blenheim'

"But 'twas a famous victory !"

Robert Southey has not lived or sung in vain For his imaginary Kaspar has his *antitype* among the living—Mr Kher, to wit I have to say so, particularly in view of the following correspondence

"Dear Mr Kher,—By general repute (or, rather, by common consent) you are known to me as having once been a very capable teacher I remember a lawyer friend of mine here particularly recalling with admiration his contact (as a student) with yourself as a fellow in Wilson College, Bombay<sup>1</sup> That emboldens me to approach you—once more—after a lapse of some 10 years—with my request to help me in a missionary undertaking of public enlightenment It concerns us all as followers of the Hindu religion, of which I look upon you as one of the most eminent and worthy professors I only wish you to be worthier than you are by looking at my picture of 'Rama rajya', at least so far as it bears on the case of Sita I am speaking of my old publication (1932) of RAMA RAJYA of which I have arranged the publication of the 2nd edition You may remember, at the time of its first publication, arrangements had been made to include a Foreword from you But owing to the incarceration of yourself along with most others of the nation's leaders after the 2nd R T Conference, it did not materialise The book came out without your expected Foreword It was, however, well received in *almost all quarters* of the press, in India and England There are some slight additions and alterations to occur in the 2nd edition So, if you wish to have a look at these before you pen your

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<sup>1</sup> This is a British Protestant Christian Missionary Institution

Foreword, I think I shall have to arrange for the press-sheets to be sent to you as soon as they are ready; or shall I send copies only of the *addenda* etc.?

"The accompanying extracts from what is expected to be an Introduction to the book by a pukka (or shall I call him 'hard-boiled'?) Rationalist—rather severely critical of one who calls himself a *critical* co-religionist of Gandhi—will give you an idea of the scope and nature of the book.

"If you are pressed for time, your own Foreword need extend to no more than a dozen lines. Even half a dozen or five will do. I don't expect them to be wholly commendatory. Perhaps I would prefer them to be such—particularly in view of my pukka Rationalist friend's partly hostile Introduction.<sup>1</sup> Only, let not yours be quite non-committal, as was Abraham Lincoln's famous remark: 'For those who like this kind of book, this is the kind of book they will like.'

"I do have a sort of answer to my Rationalist friend's rather sarcastic question, when he wonders whether I am going to set up my own ism.<sup>2</sup> I may say that

<sup>1</sup> This is in reference to the following passage discarded in the final form of the draft Introduction

<sup>2</sup> "While the author's aim is to lead the reader to the rationalistic outlook and to plead for it in all spheres (p 66), he does it as his title indicates, not from the standpoint of one who disowns all Religion, but as the *co-religionist* of his nominal addressee, 'Mahatma' Gandhi, 'the Greatest Hindu of the age'. In this mode of appeal there may be some beauty, as the author evidently believes there is—not to mention the safety of the proceeding. I beg, however, to differ. Mr Nadkarni pleads as a religionist (albeit rationalistically inclined) to another religionist ridden, as the latter is, by 'slave-mentality', because of the fundamental ancestor-worship in his make-up. Would it not have been intellectually more honest, if rather more precarious or less safe, for the rationalistic expostulator to stand clear from the ground of religion and meet his obscurantist addressee, however 'great' a Hindu he may be, with the weapons of reason alone (or Reason and Conscience as our author calls them)? If Mr Nadkarni is not going to break with Mr Gandhi's ever-changing 'Hinduism' or any other brand of religion, with some dash, as it is bound to have it, of obscurantism or irrationalism in it,—then I ask, is Mr Nadkarni going to fashion and set up his own ism, free from all such taints? I wonder."

my RAMA RAJYA is virtually—or implicitly—a case made out for the production of a new Smṛiti for this age—a socio religious document round which to rally all Hindus and would be Hindus—in short, a New Testament of Hinduism,—the idea of which was broached by me as far back as 1927 and has been widely discussed and sympathetically received in all progressive quarters of Hindudom

“Before closing, I may introduce myself to you as the founder of the HINDU SABHA, Karwar, a body which, founded in 1927, has *never* yet been affiliated to the Hindu Maha Sabha —Yours sincerely,”

Sd/- S D NADKARNI

“Karwar, 15th July, 1940 ”

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“Dear Mr Nadkarni,—Your letter of the 15th July I disagree with the conclusions in your Book and also differ from the views expressed in the introduction I will say so in my Foreword emphatically If you are agreeable I will send you a very short Foreword as soon as I receive your reply —Yours sincerely, Sd/- B G Kher D/- Bombay, 19th July, 1940 ”

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“Dear Mr Kher,—Yours of the 19th Yes, I *am* agreeable to your proposal If it is not just what I wanted, it is the next best that I could have For, however ‘slashing’ your Foreword might be, I would prefer it to one, however laudatory, from any other quarter I would look askance only at the non committal sort of thing illustrated by Lincoln’s famous gibe at wishy washy reviewers, already quoted I am breathlessly waiting for your bit, short and—if not sweet—pungently pleasant, as I expect it to be —Yours sincerely,

Sd/- S D NADKARNI

“Karwar, July 22, 1940

"P S —As to my faith in poor martyred Sita,<sup>1</sup> I am very anxious that either I should save your soul or you should save mine." So it is only (or, rather, nothing less than) a question of our souls as Hindus

Sd /- S D NADKARNI

"Dear Mr Kher,—Please treat my letter of the 22nd as—if not cancelled (for nothing is really cancelled)—modified to next to-nothing by what follows."

"Received your kind favour of the 19th. I thank you for your prompt reply to my humble request for your Foreword to my RAMA RAJYA, which I intend to get brought out again shortly. You have been pleased to warn me in your own gentle way that the Foreword will, instead of echoing my sentiments, be emphatically adverse. I shall be thankful even for such a kind of Foreword, and for the following reason.

"The infallibility of certain views as regards the righteousness of the conduct of Ramachandra in three or four matters of vital interest—(1) the abandonment of Sita, (2) the Sambuka affair, (3) the unprovoked attack on and assassination of Vali and the disposal of his dominion on a creature of his own, for which only a 'reason of State' could perhaps be pleaded, and (4) the princes Rama and Lakshmana vying with each other in making game of the poor love-lorn Surpanakha, and her final mutilation and disfigurement—not quite unprovoked, I admit, if the story is to be taken at its full face value,—at the hands of the 'chivalrous Laksh

<sup>1</sup> This is a glance at the remark which this writer heard the Hon'ble Mr Kher (as he then was) utter at a mass meeting at Ankola on May 25 1939. It was a passing fling—a cheap one at that—which he indulged in while contrasting the materialism of the West with our ancient spiritualism. There were amongst us said he some Western influenced people who would have advised Shri Ramachandra to prosecute the slanderer of his wife Sita for defamation rather than give her up to please his people as he did so unselfishly.—I hoped that what might pass as clap'rap at a mass meeting might not survive calm reflection in his study. My hope has unfortunately been balked. Sinning against the light, Mr Kher has been consistent in his obliquity.



mana,<sup>1</sup>—has been prevailing practically unchallenged in our society for such a very long time that scarcely anybody has so far considered it necessary to reconsider that view even in the light of modern and enlightened ideas of justice and fairplay. I have humbly challenged the validity of the current views about Rama's conduct, and if my views are opposed by the weighty views of a man in your position, the matter is sure to provoke thought in our society, and this itself will be no small gain to the cause of higher morality between man and man (and, I may add, between man and beast).

"I may add here that as regards the Vali episode, even if we assume that King Vali gave some cause to prince Rama for interference by abducting and misusing Sugriva's wife, that by itself would not justify Rama in bestowing Vali's wife (or rather widow) upon Sugriva. Even if we assume that the good lady's wishes or preferences were consulted in the matter, yet I may humbly be permitted to submit that *two wrongs cannot make one right*.

'I am, therefore, again requesting you to send me your Foreword, whether favourable or otherwise—

Yours sincerely,

Karwar, 26 7-40

Sd/- S D NADKARNI

The pleading of these my letters—not to mention the argument of the book—has apparently had no more effect on the case-hardened conscience of Mr Kher than the proverbial water on a duck's back.

It is, however, not so bad or hopeless as it may look at first sight. There is, after all, a silver lining to the

<sup>1</sup> In my book I have not touched on this episode which was the prime or motive cause the dreadful spring, so to say, of all Rama's subsequent misadventures as readers of the Ramayana may note. I have not dwelt on this skeleton in the Ramayanic cupboard mainly for the reason that the episode can scarcely be said to have any socio-religious bearing or significance for present-day Hinduism. There is no clear-cut moral issue involved though it may serve to debunk the reputation of the King God Rama.

cloud of Mr Kher's ancestor worship. The hold of Convention is so strong on Mr Kher's mind that he has been forced to take shelter under the plea, threadbare at best, that we must not judge past worthies (or 'unworthies') by the moral standards of our time, but only or mainly by the standards of their own times. Apart from the fact that those standards can only be conjectural ones for us of these days, the use of the argument itself is something to the good. It is a tacit confession that the beau ideal—the *ne plus ultra*—of the Rama rajyists might fail when subjected to the test of less ancient or more modern ideas. It is an admission—implicit it may be—that there has been or may be, with the process of time, a progress in our ideas of good and evil.

That consolation apart, the argument that we must judge our ancients by the standards of our ancients is one which will strike the meanest intelligence (if freed from the trammels of 'the monster Custom') as being obstructive, if not subversive, of all ideas of human progress in the moral sphere. Only a misplaced ancestor worship could reconcile us to so base an advice as that we should be false to ourselves in order to be true to our ancients.

ततस्य कूपोऽयमिति दृग्गणाः क्षारं जलं कातुर्गन्धं पिबन्ति ॥

("It is the base people that say, 'We shall have none but our father's well to drink from', who continue to drink its brackish water.")

The plea that "there is no use applying present-day standards of morality to legendary times and apportioning blame" could have held water, if our boary civilization had been, like an Egyptian mummy, dead lifeless, a thing of the past. But those legendary times live in us, the 'living past' is with us now, and seeks to drag us back to itself. I need not labour the point, which the reader will find already anticipated and dealt with on pp 21, 41, and 43, of the text.

Apart from the developing social consciousness and moral standards of a people, which admittedly admit of progress,—is there no such thing as an absolute ethical norm, the objective counterpart of the still small voice' of

Man in any age or clime—'the voice of God, which is everlasting and ever the same? It is the call of this voice I believe, where we find our own ancients condemning Rama's treatment of Vali (as witness the quotation from the Mahabharata, on p 7 of the book), and the sage Valmiki himself blaming Rama for abandoning his Sita. What have you, ancestor worshipping Mr Kher, to say to these? Are you wiser in your wisdom than Valmiki and Vyasa? (Echo answers It's not the Devil only that can cite Scripture for his purpose!)

When Mr Kher maintains that the interpretation I have given of the Gita verse, IX 32, is not the correct one he is pitting himself not only against common sense but equally against all (or almost all) the recognised authorities the commentators from the great Sankara downwards. Mr Kher comes under the category of those Hindus whose moral sense revolts against the traditional (which as here happens also to be the obvious and literal) interpretation of ancient compositions wherever they run counter to their awakened consciences but in whom the sense of ancestor worship is too powerful to let them take those works at their face value and treat them as the relics of a bygone age less enlightened than their own. Mr Kher and his ilk belong in fact to the first 'sophisticated' of the three classes I have distinguished among professors of the Hindu religion in the second footnote to page 64 of the book.

Mr Kher lets himself go at those who he says scoff at what ordinary mortals hold sacred and in whose minds there is no room for reverence for age or for sympathy for suffering. The most charitable interpretation to be put on this his scoff at reformers—the cleansers of the Augean stables of our old world legacies the liquidators of the *damnsa hereditas* of our ancient culture though the finest in the whole world in several respects and gloriously unique in some—the most charitable interpretation I say to be put on Mr Kher's scoff at those who labour to improve their heritage is to say that by 'age and suffering' he means his own age and his own suffering in the shape of his wounded feelings on finding

his musty and deleterious but blindly cherished ideals criticised in the cold light of Reason as motivated by the enlightened Conscience of those reformers

To think otherwise, or to suppose that Mr Kher can find it in his heart to blame (instead of blessing) reformers who so selflessly, and even self-sacrificingly, devote themselves to righting age-old wrongs, as being without any 'sympathy for suffering', would be both an insult to his intelligence and a charge of heartlessness against a naturally good hearted *gentleman* like him. In fact, it would be like charging an honest man with falsely raising the cry of 'Stop thief' against another honest man who is pursuing a thief.

Perhaps Mr Kher's case only illustrates the difficulty even for educated people who can think for themselves, but are trammelled by professional prospects or political ambitions, to break through the crust of inherited prejudices and prepossessions. Their shortsightedness is only to be deplored.

If the closing cant of Mr Kher's about 'unsettling children's faith'—in what?—even a Sudra lynching wife-deserting King God—were to prevail, then would Hindudom continue to be, and deserve to be the door mat of the nations. The fate of Jewry will be the fate of Hindudom, if Hindudom wake not up betimes from the stupor of such faithless 'faith' as Mr Kher cherishes, or perhaps only affects with ulterior motives

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥

परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्टताम् ।

धर्मं संस्थापनार्थाय संममामि युगे युगे ॥

Gita, IV 7-8

I am very grateful to Mr Kher for his Foreword, but for which I should have had no occasion to take this quite necessary (though rather lengthened) glance at the mentality that it represents

Karwar, }  
Aug 16, 1940 }

S D NADKARNI

## EPILOGUE.

The object of this book, as I take it, is to provoke us all to re-think accepted notions, in particular the supposed 'ideal' nature of Rama rajya or Rama's Kingdom. This is usually taken for granted, and Rama rajya looked upon as if it were the veritable Kingdom of God on earth. In the second (but equally important) place, the aim of the book is to get us to revise our notions of those ancient compositions whose doctrines have been treated as 'gospel truth',—as immutable canons of conduct for our society in all ages. In short, RAMA RAJYA is a sustained and closely reasoned protest against those who would have us all hark back to 'the good old days' (of several milleniums ago) indiscriminately.

Mr Nadkarni, its author, is not a revolutionary. He is a rebel,—rather, a passionate protestant—against the 'established' socio religious order. This supposed established order is really a system that is blindly acquiesced in by the populace and sustained with no more life-force (*elan vital*) than a benighted inertia—practically unchallenged because few dare to challenge or question those age-old ideologies behind that order. Mr Nadkarni is not for ending that order, but for mending it, even wholesale if need be,—overhauling it from top to bottom. That is only a step removed from revolutionary reconstruction. That being granted it may at first sight seem to be a mere verbal distinction, whether you call one like Mr Nadkarni a revolutionary or a protestant reformer (or 'reformist'). It is true, nobody can work in a vacuum, and even the greatest revolutionary has to have his feet upon the ground, though his head may be in the clouds. Still there is a real distinction between the revolutionary proper and the reformist proper, and the single step that separates one from the other is all important.

Certain institutions *may* have served their purpose, in a way, in their day, supposing they were conducive to the good of the community at large in their day. But to foist them upon us long after they have outlived their usefulness (if any), as though they were sacrosanct, or

his musty and deleterious but blindly cherished ideals criticised in the cold light of Reason as motivated by the enlightened Conscience of those reformers

To think otherwise, or to suppose that Mr Kher can find it in his heart to blame (instead of blessing) reformers who so selflessly, and even self-sacrificingly, devote themselves to righting age-old wrongs, as being without any 'sympathy for suffering', would be both an insult to his intelligence and a charge of heartlessness against a naturally good-hearted *gentleman* like him. In fact it would be like charging an honest man with falsely raising the cry of 'Stop thief' against another honest man who is pursuing a thief.

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Karwar,  
Aug 16, 1940 }

S D NADKARNI

These five a man should ever bless, to the undoing of his great sins)

It is worth while noting that almost every one of these ladies is 'a woman with a past' This beatification of Sita with the rest of them is now part of the orthodox tradition But like almost everything else that may be good in that tradition, the verse in question may be recited by the most bigoted of our bigots in mere mechanical fashion, as a magical formula, as it were,—with nothing like a real spiritual significance attached to it Yet the verse itself is a monument of the idealism of our ancients,—now, alas, degraded in the mouths and hands of a degenerate and degenerating priesthood<sup>1</sup> The priesthood is supposed to have a function in the history of civilization It is the preservation and transmission of prophetic dispensations I myself, as a Marxist, believe in neither prophet nor priest But if 'Hindudom' (as Mr Nadkarni calls the congeries of castes called Hindu) needs a prophet or can do with one at this juncture, I believe it will be in the person of one like my friend Mr Nadkarni There is a method in his madness, which, while some may despise, others will envy or admire

But, be that as it may, what religionist, after reading Mr Nadkarni's plea, as earnest as it is learned, dare

<sup>1</sup> The following passage in the address delivered on Jan 3 1932 to a social of the Karwar High School by Mr Y R Divekar the then Divisional Forest Officer Karwar as its president has been brought to my notice by Mr Nadkarni as illustrative of the lengths to which the degeneration I am speaking of has been carried and as bearing on the virtue or the need of unsettling the minds of the young

In my childhood I remember a particularly revolting and sickening story of obedience which used to be recounted at *Kirtans* [Hindu musico spiritual rhapsodies] with gusto, and which the audience was expected to admire as a piece of *Pativrata Dharma* [a devoted wife's devoir] We were told of a पतिराज [lord of a husband or grand husband] who was so enamoured of a prostitute that he began to waste away as he had very little of this world's goods to win his way to the prostitute's favour The wife then rose to the heights of Satidharma [a chaste wife's devoir] She served

unalterable for all time like 'the law of the Medes and Persians',—is it not the height of suicidal folly, racially speaking? It undoubtedly is. And the modern-educated orthodox among us do seem to see the folly, as they admit (in the words of one of them) that "if we did today what the people did several thousands of years ago, we must receive judgment according to our deserts and present-day standards' Yes, there we are. That some of them refuse to be disillusioned even at this late hour is no fault of their heads but rather of their hearts and their vested interests.

Mr Nadkarni is an *advocatus diaboli* in reference to Rama only so far as he is concerned as an '*advocatus dei*' for canonizing (at least) two of Rama's victims, namely, Sita and Sambuka. His is not a plea for de-canonizing Rama. He is prepared to give him his due, as one is expected to give even the Devil his due.

As regards the sanctification of Sambuka, it may pass as a gesture of reparation for past wrongs from the privileged classes to their under-dogs. But the under dogs themselves, now roused to a sense of their human rights and dignity, do not seem to be hankering after such a gesture from their erstwhile liege lords.

As for the canonization of Sita, I can tell Mr Nadkarni that she is already 'canonized', or 'beatified', or whatever you call it. Her name figures, he may recall, among the 'Five Blessed Ladies' whose names every orthodox Hindu is expected to repeat the first thing in the morning—strung together in a well known Sanskrit verse (in which by the way, for 'पंचकं सा'—we meet with the very common but incorrect reading of 'पंचकन्या'—a solecism for five virgins—for they were none of them virgins and in the second place even if they were, that would not be the proper word for it grammatically). The verse is as follows .

अहल्या द्रौपदी सीता तारा मंदोदरी तथा ।

पंचकं ना स्मरेन्नित्यं महापातकनाशनम् ॥

(Ahalya Draupadi Sita Tara, and Mandodari likewise —



These five a man should ever bless, to the undoing of his great sins)

It is worth while noting that almost every one of these ladies is 'a woman with a past' This beatification of Sita with the rest of them is now part of the orthodox tradition But like almost everything else that may be good in that tradition, the verse in question may be recited by the most bigoted of our bigots in mere mechanical fashion, as a magical formula, as it were,—with nothing like a real spiritual significance attached to it Yet the verse itself is a monument of the idealism of our ancients,—now, alas, degraded in the mouths and hands of a degenerate and degenerating priesthood<sup>1</sup> The priesthood is supposed to have a function in the history of civilization It is the preservation and transmission of prophetic dispensations I myself, as a Marxist, believe in neither prophet nor priest But if 'Hindudom' (as Mr Nadkarni calls the congeries of castes called Hindu) needs a prophet or can do with one at this juncture, I believe it will be in the person of one like my friend Mr Nadkarni There is a method in his madness, which, while some may despise, others will envy or admire

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object that our quasi-rationalist surgeon is only bent on amputating septic tissues, when in fact he is most careful—in my opinion, more careful than he need have been,—to engraft healthy tissues (or, rather, what appear to him to be such), in place of the diseased and disabling ones, on to the Hindu body politic?

Even if it be proved that Rama never lived, or that Rama was the hero of a 'dramatized dream', as is the fashion now a-days with a school of Rationalists to treat every epoch maker of the past, even then, I say, the argument of the book will stand, for it is not concerned at all with the historicity (or the contrary) of the 'King God Rama, but with ethical assaying of the order of ideas associated with that name. Even if Rama were

the prostitute in various menial capacities with such devotion that she obtained a boon from the prostitute. By this time the पतिराज [husband lord] had wasted away to a skeleton through his unrequited passion. So another height of Sati dharma was scaled by the noble Pativrata [devoted wife]. She actually carried her husband to the house of the prostitute and there the curtain was rung down with, of course tumultuous applause from all who saw this supreme act of Sati dharma.

"I have gone into these unavoury details in order to throw into relief our traditional background of beliefs. With such a background it is even more necessary than it would be otherwise to break new ground. We are too prone to obey. Our young men and children, therefore need all the more to know that in mere obedience there is no virtue that it is rather the badge of the slave while we who are older need to keep reminding ourselves that unreasoning obedience obedience which is not willing obedience which is inspired by fear is not worth having at any rate for our children.

I hope the Head master is not regretting having asked me to address this Gathering. I earnestly hope he is not thinking that I am unsettling the minds of his young charges and making his work and the work of his assistants more difficult than it already is. But I speak out of a certain bitterness of heart, a heart in which all the forces surrounding my childhood appear to have conspired to implant almost ineradicably the seeds of fear. I almost said cowardice which it has cost me conscious effort often of a painful kind to overcome. Even today though I do not believe in ghosts I have not quite lost my fear of them even today in the presence of those in authority I have the old school boys fluttering of heart for no earthly reasons. I have to conquer it with an effort of the will and this is so unnecessary waste of vital power

proved to be an unhistorical figure, Mr. Nadkarni's critique of Rama rajya will not be undermined. It will stay, all the same. To adapt Wordsworth's lines,—

The faith and morals will hold,

Which Nadkarni holds.

For RAMA-RAJYA expounds

Truths that wake,

To perish never.

Lastly, RAMA-RAJYA is not a work of art. It does not purport to be, nor is it claimed to be an 'original' piece of literature. It is pre-eminently a piece of criticism. But as a piece of criticism it borders on 'original' creation. Even in critical writing there is such a thing as originality, and Mr. Nadkarni's work is full of it. Diogenes the philosopher's

that can you wonder if I wish to save my young friends, the boys of today, from this unnecessary waste?

"It is the privilege of youth to do and dare, to soar into the empyrean where our leaden wings will no longer take us. For Heaven's sake let us not clip their glorious wings or weigh them down with the load of fear in the name of discipline rather with due reverence let us help them in their upward path by being wise guides by acting as elder brothers who help them at the difficult turns, with our knowledge of the accumulated experience and wisdom of the past. Only thus can youth ever hope to add to its heritage of past achievement and thought

"And to you my young friends, the present students of this High School, I would say. Be bold be fearless alike in deed and thought. It is an irony of fate that many of us educated men in this country, while scaling immense and dizzy heights in the realm of pure thought are incapable of putting up even a feeble fight against the innumerable petty tyrannies of every day life. The men who will boldly declare in a Vedantic ecstasy 'सोऽहम्' 'I am He'—meaning that they are a part of the Divine—will be anemic and nerveless in the presence of social injustice. Almost daily in the course of my official duties, I have occasion to feel that petty abuses of power on the part of subordinates are going on. They go on unchecked because even those among us who have had the blessings of education suffer them to go on, because our sense of justice as well as of social solidarity is not sufficiently keen, because we love a little temporary ease more than a life freed from such petty tyrannies because we shrink from making a determined effort against

compliment to the emperor Alexander the Great is well known: "If I were not Diogenes, I would be Alexander." In the same strain I may say: "If I were not Deshpande, the 'Raghunath' of Hindustani and Marathi letters, I would be the Nadkarni of Anglo-Indian letters." If the imagination of any reader of the work is not to be stirred or impressed by the many 'purple patches' that are scattered through RAMA-RAJYA (some of which Prof. Karve has indicated in his excellent Introduction), then indeed must his mind be a singularly unpoetic or else uncultured one. To adapt the well-known lines of the Sanskrit poet,—

सुभाषितेन गीतेन रामराज्यस्य मृपया ।

मनो न द्रवते यस्य स वै मुक्तोऽथवा पशुः ॥

(Whoso finds not his mind melt with a wise saw  
or a song,

—Or yet with the charm of RAMA-RAJYA,

Sure, that one is either a soul unworldly,

—Or—a beast.)

R. S. DESHPANDE,

(of Satara, an alumnus of  
the Kashi Vidyā-Pīth or

Benares National University).

Karwar, 6-9-1940.

abuses, whenever the occasion demands. India, with some of the Latin countries like Spain and Italy, has the unenviable reputation of being among those countries in which bribery and corruption are rife. This is really a reflection on us educated men because those who suffer these things to continue and even submit to them without protest, knowing them to be wrong, make it easier for such wrongs to continue to flourish. As Professor Leslie says 'Those who are silent in the presence of injustice are in fact part authors of it.' You will be with other youths like you the makers of the India of tomorrow. To make it a better India freed from the abuses I have mentioned, freed also from the age-long tyrannies of caste, will require constant readiness to suffer. This kind of courage is not to be gained by merely wishing for it. It has to be built up in the character by constant practice until it becomes a habit, and the time for building it up until it has become a second nature is now."

यदा किञ्चिज्ज्ञोऽहं द्विप इव मद्गन्धः समभवम्  
 तदा सर्वज्ञोऽस्मीत्यभवदवलितं मम मनः ।  
 यदा किञ्चित् किञ्चित् घुघजनसकाशादवगतम्  
 तदा मूर्खोऽस्मीति ज्वर इव मदो मे व्यपगतः ॥  
 —भर्तृहरिः ।

Time was when I, a little knower,  
 ran amuck like a rogue elephant

Then was I puffed up in my mind,  
 thinking I was a know all

But when by little and little  
 I did learn from the wise,

Then was I rid of my pride, like a fever,  
 feeling myself the fool that I was

—BHARTRIHHARI,

*Rendered by S D N 27 8-40*

## ‘ REAR-WORD ’

By Anand V Muzumdar, B Sc, M.B.B.S

The gist of the author's say in this book in effect seems to be "Ramachandra may have been a great ruler of his own time. He may have lived true to the highest standards of that age. But is it not the limit of obstinate conservatism to try to maintain and justify those very standards now ? So also, the old Smritis written at that particular stage of human civilisation had their day, but is it not high time now, that we overhauled them or scrapped them altogether if necessary and produced a new one ?" The author is out to reform the old Hindu religion fundamentally. He wants to "ring out the old and ring in the new"

The author is a rebel, but then he is not a revolutionary; he is only a reformist Hindu. His intention is not the unsettling of the "innocent faith" of the simple folk. His indignation is rather at the reactionary orthodox who, taking advantage of this very "innocent faith" of the simple masses want to cite the scriptures (like the proverbial devil), in support of their reactionary views and deeds. The author has handled the matter in an original and masterly manner.

Two score centuries or so have passed since Ramachandra ruled in India, and, practically, the world has been ideologically still where it was then ! Woman remains still unemancipated. Even simple justice is denied to her—the bare justice of her being admitted as pure when she has been violated against her will by force, let alone her equality of right with man, to err !<sup>1</sup> Imperialism, (now emerging in a new garb as the handmaid of Capitalism) is still rampant in the world and the Colonials, the subject races under the heels of the imperialist gods, are still looked down upon as an inferior people, as chattels, to be trodden down !<sup>2</sup>

But, as we are nearing the middle of the twentieth century, signs of the dawn of a new era are showing themselves on the horizon. Humanity is on the threshold of a new order—a new order, transcending the barriers not only of race and caste, but even of nationality and class ! A new religion is rising !

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<sup>1</sup> As for the canonising of Sita, which our reformist author has demanded I may bring to his notice that it has already been done since long ago ! Sita and four other sauntis of her sex have been held forth as models of womanly virtue and chastity to be sung every morning that men's sins may be washed away !

अहल्या द्रौपदी सीता वारा मंदोदरी तथा ।

पंचकं ना स्मरेन्नित्यं महापातकनाशनम् ॥

But the modern woman does not want that. She would rather have all the normal, fundamental rights of a "human being" in full !

<sup>2</sup> The "Shambukas" of this age are waging a winning battle to come into their own. They also do not want canonising.

And as I conclude, the following resplendent verses of the great Rabindra-Nath Tagore, read in my boyhood days, are ringing in my ears, like the notes of a clarion call !

“Leave this chanting and singing and telling of heads !  
Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of  
a temple with doors all shut ? Open thine eyes and  
see thy God is not before thee !

“He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground  
and where the path maker is breaking stones He is  
with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is  
covered with dust . ”

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**'Comrade' Dinkar Desai, M.A., LL.B.,  
Member of the Servants-of-India Society,  
on RAMA-RAJYA.**

*Extract from Letter to Author dated Bombay, Sept. 6, 1940*

"Under the Order served on me by the Government [of Bombay] under the Defence of India Rules, I cannot make any statement . . . for publication. With regard to the contents of the Epilogue [by 'Comrade' Deshpande] I generally agree with what is written there . . . I hope that the 2nd edition of "Rama-Rajya" will have a large sale and a favourable reception—With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,  
DINKAR DESAI'

*Extract from Reply to Above, dated Karnar, Sept. 8, 1940*

" \* \* \* 'Comrade' Deshpande, whom you perhaps remember is from Satara, and now a private tutor at Karwar, a very good, resourceful, young man, as eager to learn as he is willing to teach. As he happens to be an *alumnus* of the *Kashi Padya-Pith* (Benares National University), that is a qualification in my favour; you see, it is good that my 'irreligious' book should be blessed by one bred at such a centre of religious orthodoxy, the holiest of holy places of Hindudom, as Benares!— \* \* \* You wish for a good sale to the book. As to that, I may say, a good sale is the last thing I expect for it. I am not after any such thing as a 'sale' for it. I would even be giving away its copies free to those who, not affording to buy them, would ask for them for a reading. In fact, I am not sure if the 1st edition was sold out or mostly went to the trunk makers to line their trunks with, or to the tea-shop keepers to wrap up their *bhajes* [a kind of eatables] in!—With best wishes . . . I remain—Ever yours,

S D NADKARNI "



## APPENDIX II

### BHAVABHUTI ON THE SITA EPISODE Etc.

The following synopsis by Romesh Chunder Dutt of Bhavabhuti's dramas based on Ramayanic themes deserve our readers' attention. The passages have been taken wholesale from his *magnum opus*, so freely drawn upon for the body of this book,—viz the "History of Civilization in Ancient India" (1890), vol III, pp 418-426. We need hardly make an apology for adding them here and inviting our readers to peruse them, or re-peruse them, as the case may be. While doing so, we are not unmindful of the fate of many excellent works of classical antiquity which have come down to us only in the form of quotations or extracts made from them in other works which, having been somehow rescued from mediæval barbarism, have survived to modern times. Would it be too much or extravagant on our part to hope and trust that if ever Dutt's work on our ancient civilization comes to be lost to the civilization of posterity, it will be extant in those considerable extracts from it which figure throughout RAMA-RAJYA, the *spolia opima* of our own day?

S D N

The other two plays of Bhavabhuti [than the *Malati Madhata*] are taken from the Ramayana. One of them the *Maharaja Charita* narrates the story of Rama from his boyhood to his conquests in Ceylon and return with Sita to his native country. This play is decidedly inferior to the other plays of Bhavabhuti, but nevertheless contains passages of great power. There is a ring of true poetry in the passage in which the ancient king Janaka, (the promulgator of the Upanishads and the proud asserter of Kshatriya equality with Brahmans in learning) is roused to indignation by the pretensions of Parasurama, the son of Jamadagni. The old king indignantly exclaims

“Although he hates us, still we have had patience with him so long. When he shakes us again like a blade of grass, then let the bow be bent against him, although he be a Brahman.”

Equally appropriate is the proud contempt with which the mighty Ravana listens to proposals to avoid hostilities with Sita. The source of the Godavari—in the poet's own native land,—is thus described

Where, amid Janasthana's frowning woods,  
The tall Prasravana uprears his head,  
Dark tintured in the clouds, and bathes his brow  
With their descending dews, thence through his caves,  
He calls the oozing moisture, and sends forth  
The pure Godavari to win her way,  
Stately and clear, through ancient trees that shade,  
Impervious tangling, her majestic course

Wilson

The other play *Uttara Rama Charita* continues the story of the Ramayana to Sita's exile, and to the reconciliation of Rama with his children Lava and Kusa. In power and vigour, and in graphic and forcible description, this play is equal to the *Malati Madhava*, while in pathos and tenderness it will compare with anything in the whole range of Sanscrit literature.

The story is the story of the Ramayana and need not be told in detail. The play opens with a conversation of Rama and Sita now returned from Ceylon, and seated on the throne of Ayodhya or Oude. In the second scene Lakshmana exhibits to them a series of paintings representing the past occurrences of Rama's life, and the gentle Sita can scarcely look over the scenes of her past sufferings without sorrow. The poet of course has a word to say about his beloved Godavari which

Bursts forth, and down the mountain wends her way  
Through gloomy shades and thick entangling woods  
Wilson,

and Rama reminds Sita of their happy days passed there  
in touching lines,—

Recall'st thou, love, our humble happy dwelling  
Upon the borders of the shining stream  
Where every hour in fond endearments wrapped,  
Or in sweet interchange of thought engaged,  
We lived in transport, not a wish beyond  
Each other, reckless of the flight of time ?

Wilson

The languid Sita, then gone with child wants repose,  
and Rama lovingly addresses her—

Be these arms thy pillow,  
Thine, ever since the nuptial knot united us,  
Thine, in the days of infancy and youth,  
In lonely thickets and in princely palaces,  
Thine, ever thine

*Sita* True, true, my ever kind and cherished lord

*Sleeps*

*Rama* Her latest waking words are words of love,  
And naught of her hut is most dear to me  
Her presence is ambrosia to my sight,  
Her contact fragrant sandal, her fond arms  
Twined round my neck are a far richer clasp  
Than costliest gems, and in my house she reigns  
The guardian goddess of my fame and fortune  
Oh ! I could never bear again to lose her

Wilson,

The last sentiment is artfully put in here by the poet, for Rama is on the eve of losing Sita again. Weak as he is loving and gentle, he hears with distress, immediately after leaving Sita in her sleep, that his subjects are ill pleased with his conduct in accepting Sita again after she had been carried away by Ravana. Too weak to bear popular dissatisfaction he submits to their desires, and sends poor Sita to exile.

Twelve years have since passed and gone. The twins to whom Sita gave birth soon after her exile have grown to be sturdy boys, versed in arms as in learning under the tuition of Valmiki. Sita leads a pensive life in the forests, her face,

Pale and wan and wet with tears,  
She moves along like Tenderness  
Invested with a mortal dress,  
Or like embodied Grief she shines  
That sad o'er love in absence pines

Hilson

It is arranged that Sita, rendered invisible by divine power, should have an interview with Rama, and the poet must needs have the interview on the banks of the Godavari. There Rama strays accompanied by Vasanti, a friend of Sita, and Sita and Tamasa,—invisible to Rama—also repair there. Every scene there recalls to Rama the by gone days when Rama and Sita lived there together and fills him with grief and Vasanti does not fail by cruel though gentle hints to bring home to Rama his injustice towards Sita. Bhavabhuti is too spirited not to feel indignant at Rama's extreme weakness in yielding to popular clamour, and at his unspeakable injustice in sending an innocent and helpless and loving wife to exile. And though the poet shares a Hindu's feeling of general respect for Rama, yet the reader can perceive the poet is determined to give Rama "a bit of his mind" for his unparalleled feebleness and crime.

Vasanti takes care to remind Rama,—

Here in this plantain grove  
Behold the marble which in happier days  
Supported thee and Sita. Here she sat  
And from her hands gave fodder to the deer,  
That boldly crowded round their gentle mistress.

*Rama.* I cannot bear to look upon it. [*Weeps.*]

*Wilson.*

Poor Sita, who is present, though invisible to Rama, can bear it no longer; she exclaims,

Vasanti, this is cruel.  
My Lord demands respect from all, and most  
From those who love me.

*Wilson.*

But Vasanti is inexorable, and goes on speaking to Rama,

How badst thou the heart  
To drive that gentle being from thee? Once  
She was thy love, thy other dearer life,  
Light of thine eyes, and nectar of thy soul,\*

*Wilson.*

In vain does Rama plead the people's will. Vasanti goes on and makes horrible suggestions as to the fate which has probably overtaken Sita after her exile in the forest. Rama shudders and weeps aloud. Sita can witness her lord's sufferings no longer, and exclaims to Tamasa, "alas! he weeps aloud." But Tamasa answers,

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\* No student of Sanscrit who has read these last two lines in the original has ever forgotten their matchless beauty, rhythm and tenderness.

'Tis better thus  
 To give our sorrows way. Sufferers should speak  
 Their griefs, the bursting heart that overflows  
 In words obtains relief

*Walsby.*

We almost think we are perusing a paraphrase of  
 Shakespeare's matchless lines in *Macbeth*

Give sorrow words, the grief that does not speak,  
 Whispers the o'er fraught heart and makes it break.

And yet the bard of Vidarbha lived eight centuries  
 before the bard of Avon!

The cruel lesson is administered to Rama until he  
 faints. Sita, herself invisible, touches his forehead, and  
 at that loving touch Rama revives, exclaiming "Joy,  
 joy, Vasanti, wilt thou share my joy?" and declares that  
 he had felt the touch of Sita's hand—

I could not be deceived,  
 Too well I know the touch of that dear hand  
 The marriage rite first placed in mine, even now  
 Cool as the snow drift to my fevered palm,  
 And soft as jasmine buds, I grasp it

*Hilson*

But Sita gets away. She and Tamasa must depart but  
 she can scarcely tear herself away

Oh, let me look,  
 A little moment longer, on a form  
 I never never, may behold again!

*Walsby*

And before leaving she exclaims  
 I bow me to the feet of my dear lord,  
 The source of every blessing

*Hilson*

Yes, the poor, banished, injured Sita bows to the feet of her dear lord,—that lord who had heedlessly, feebly, cruelly sent her to the forest,—alone, helpless, on the eve of her confinement! Female self abnegation can go *no further, undying love has never been more forcibly represented*, human imagination has never pictured a nobler, purer, saintlier character than that of the gentle, ever loving, all forgiving Sita

Once again, in another place the poet gives vent to his indignation at Rama's feeble conduct. The ancient king Janaka, revered as much for his prowess as for his holy life, his pious sacrifices and his vedic lore, grows indignant when he remembers his daughter's sufferings. The warm blood tingles in his old veins when he ponders on Rama's conduct, and he bursts out in rage—

Shame on the thankless race that wronged thy fame,  
And Rama's haste to listen to their calumnies,  
The cruel blow that has overwhelmed my child  
Arouses all my soul, and tempts my wrath  
To deal with arms, or direr imprecations,  
Destruction on my Sita's persecutors

Wilson

The story of Rama's Asvamedha sacrifice is well known. The horse is let loose, and Rama's son dares to detain it, and thus unwillingly provokes hostilities with Rama's forces. The meeting of Lava and Chandraketu is well described. Both are young heroes, full of ardour for battle, but displaying chivalrous courtesy and respect towards each other.

Chandraketu descends from his car,—why?  
To pay my homage to this valiant youth,  
And do a soldier's duty. To assail  
At such advantage one who fights on foot  
The god of arms forbids

Wilson

And this was written before chivalry was developed in Europe

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The sage Valmiki arranges a happy reconciliation with which the play is to conclude but the poet must have another hint at Rama before he lays down his pen. A theatrical performance is to take place before Rama, and the subject is Rama's desertion of his wife! Sita on the stage calls for help when deserted, and in her distress and agony throws herself in the Ganges. Rama can bear it no longer and starts up exclaiming

Dear love, forbear! I fly to thy assistance

Wilson

His brother Lakshmana reminds him

Does my lord remember, what he views is but a

fiction?

*Lama* Alas! that such a portion should have been the gift of Rama to his tender bride, the dear companion of his forest dwelling

Wilson

The reader is herein reminded of the stage in Hamlet which was contrived to convict Hamlet's uncle of his guilt. The play ends happily, Rama receives back Sita and his boys Lava and Kusa and the people of Ayodhya are penitent, and bend "in prostrate homage to the Queen."

When we have spoken of Kalidasa and of Bhavabuti, we have spoken of all that is best in the Sanscrit dramatic literature. Several hundreds of plays must have been composed and enacted in what we have called the Augustan Era of Sanscrit literature but the works of genius only survive polished imitation and lifeless pieces do not stand the test of time. Some of the masterpieces of Shakespeare will be read even after Shakespeare's language becomes a dead language but Marlowe or even Ben Jonson will scarcely be remembered twelve centuries after the date of Elizabeth